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FEBRUARY—250.

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1971
VOL. 28, NO. 3

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE LADY HAD A GUN

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Somewhere in the night, a lovely girl waited for the certain death that was stalking her. Could Mike Shayne reach her in time—and manage to get both of them back out of there alive? . . .

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THE LADY HAD A GUN

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Hidden in the fog, a doomed girl waited for Murder. Only Mike Shayne held the slim key that might save her. Could he get there in time—and get back from there alive?



IN THE BIG, dimly lighted casino, with the roulette wheels no longer turning, Thomas Donegan's voice sounded oddly off-key. It had ceased to be the controlled voice of a professional gambler who could chill a bad loser just by the coldness of his stare. It had become the voice of a man inflamed by passion and determined to have his way regardless of the consequences.

"When I want something real bad I usually get it," he cried. "You've worked for me long enough to know that."

Donegan was a tall, sturdily built man. The girl who was backing away from him between the tables looked unusually small by contrast. Actually she was of average height and her inexpensive clothes, while they were not unbecoming, gave her the look of a young housewife in modest circumstances who had strayed by accident into a plush gambling casino.

It would not have been a totally false impression, for Marjorie Lynn, while unmarried, was in modest circumstances and there was an air of

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE

SHORT NOVEL



sobriety about her despite her striking blonde loveliness. But for four months now she had been well-acquainted with the casino as Donegan's secretary and had been about to depart for the night with her duties completed when he had waylaid her between the tables by planting himself directly in her path.

"You know how I feel about you," Donegan persisted, with harsh impatience. "Why don't you listen to reason? We can talk about it, can't we?"

"No, we can't," Marjorie said, shaking her head and continuing to back away from him. "If you had just wanted to talk you'd have kept your hands off me. If you touch me again I'll scream."

"All right," Donegan said. "If that's the way you want it."

He stopped advancing, thrust his hand under his coat and with uncontrollable anger, whipped out a flat, snub-nosed automatic pistol. The instant she saw it she knew that if she continued to resist his advances he would be quite capable of shooting her. She could tell he was lost to all sanity now and would go to any length to possess her.

"No. Keep away from me."

Marjorie was frantic with terror now and managed for an instant to lengthen the distance that separated them. Before she could put the full length of a table between them and edge herself around to the far side of it, where a dash to the door might have saved her, Donegan

lurched forward. He grabbed her by the shoulder and twisted her brutally about. His hand went over her mouth and he jammed the gun against her side without raising it to a level with her heart.

It was pure madness. But the wild thought that even if the gun went off the wound might not be fatal made Marjorie lose her head completely. She began furiously to struggle, straining backwards, beating on his chest with her fists.

It took Marjorie only a moment to realize how useless that was and that she must make an effort to get the gun away from him. With straining fingers she tore at his hand, managing, for the barest instant, to get a grip on the handle and turn the weapon about.

Donegan had clearly not expected her to put up so fierce a struggle and a shot suddenly rang out before he could pry her fingers apart.

The blast was deafening and seemed strangely remote, not muffled at all. Marjorie experienced a feeling of weightlessness that sent her spinning backwards, feather light, away from the gambler's collapsing body.

Donegan fell heavily, with a stricken groan, bending sharply forward as his knees struck the floor and then still further forward until he was lying in a crumpled heap at her feet. The girl stood staring down at him for a moment, too stunned to move or think, her arms swinging loosely at her side.



He was no longer moving and blood was trickling out from beneath him across the floor. A feeling of unreality swept over Marjorie when she saw the gun was still in her clasp. She had not even felt the tug of it, for her arm had gone numb. But suddenly it became a horrible, leaden weight and she let it drop to the floor.

With the clatter still echoing in her ears she swung about, crossed the casino to the door and ran out into the night.

It was a moonless night. Less than a hundred feet separated the casino from a vast, shadowy region of sand and lapping waves and the instant lights of a beach front hotel.

Marjorie Lynn did not run in the direction of the hotel, but toward a swirling section of the beach where the bobbing lights of anchored

boats glittered a short distance from shore.

Only the murmur of the waves broke the stillness as she fled over the wet sand. Twice she stumbled and would have fallen if she had not caught herself up in time. The instant she reached the water's edge she disrobed, unzipped her dress and letting it fall to the sand, tearing and ripping at the garments beneath as she stepped out of its angle-clinging folds.

In a moment Marjorie was in her shoes and stockings. She kicked off her shoes and plunged into the water without stopping to remove the transparent nylons, an encumbrance too trivial to bother her as she swam.

She swam straight out from the beach with slow, overhand strokes, not stopping until she heard the creak of cordage and the waves lapping against Kenneth Allen's motor cruiser, which was riding at anchor thirty yards offshore.

She shouted then, and after a moment the beam of a flashlight flooded down over her and Allen's startled face stared down at her from the rail.

Marjorie Lynn waved, one arm raised high above the water, the ring on her right hand glinting like a firefly.

"Margel!" Allen called out. "What in hell are you—"

He broke off abruptly, his features tightening in alarm, "You're swimming too close to the boat. Get

back a few feet at least. I'll let a ladder down."

Allen's face vanished from the rail. In another moment, more quickly than it took her to follow his advice, his face reappeared and a short rope ladder snaked down from the rail within reach of her hands.

She grasped it instantly and ascended to the deck, brushing aside his attempt to help her over the rail. She stood facing him, swaying and shivering, clearly too shaken to experience the slightest twinge of embarrassment.

It was Allen who flushed slightly and looked away.

"There's a woolen dressing gown inside, right hand locker," he said. "It's a chilly night, so wrap yourself up tightly. I'll get you a towel."

"Something terrible happened," Marjorie said, breathing harshly. "I've got to tell you about it. I—"

"All right," he said. "But slip into that dressing gown first. Then we can talk."

IT WAS A QUITE large motor cruiser, but the three cabins were surprisingly small by contrast. Kenneth Allen, Marjorie knew, preferred living quarters that were small and cozy, and had designed the motor cruiser himself with precisely that thought in mind, furnishing it in excellent taste throughout. Not only was Allen an inspired architect, he had the fine-boned imagination of a poet.

For three months in the year he anchored in Florida waters, within hailing distance of Miami, and relaxed in the sun, going ashore only occasionally to mingle with the winter vacationists. He refused to think of himself as a vacationist in a strict sense, just a man who had arranged his life in such a way that his work time and his play time did not coincide and each could be experienced right up to the hilt without conflicting responsibilities.

By Miami standards, Allen could hardly have been thought of as a man of wealth, but his profession was a rewarding one, and his yearly income was sufficient to enable him to avoid all economic pressures. The second time he had gone ashore in the present winter he had met Marjorie Lynn at a party arranged for his benefit by a maiden aunt who frowned upon his long bachelorhood.

They had been carrying the torch for each other for close to a month without, as yet, becoming entangled in a more definite commitment.

But nothing could have been further from their minds as they sat facing each other in the largest of the three cabins. Marjorie Lynn was still shivering, although the dressing gown was drawn tight about her and she had toweled herself dry before slipping into it.

"You know what you should have done, of course," Allen said.

Marjorie nodded. "I should have gone straight to the police. Bu

somehow I—I just couldn't. I was too frightened. When I looked down and saw the gun in my hand, with the smoke coiling from it, I realized how bad it might look for me."

"Not too bad," Allen said, "even if it were found with your fingerprints on it. Donegan tried to attack you, and you managed somehow to get a grip on the handle and turn it around. It was self-defense and with Donegan's reputation it's hard to imagine a jury not acquitting you."

"But that's just it," Marjorie protested. "He hasn't too bad a reputation. You might even say that, for a professional gambler, he has an exceptionally good one. He's married, you know, with two children. His oldest son is at Harvard. His wheels are not rigged, as far as I know, and I've been his secretary long enough to have a pretty good idea exactly what goes on in the casino."

"He's still a professional gambler," Allen said. "The chances are even to one that a little digging into his past will turn up an arrest record, probably an ugly one. And you are—"

Marjorie Lynn tightened her grip on the arms of the chair in which he was sitting. "I know. A woman above suspicion. But it isn't true, so you may as well not say it."

"What do you mean it isn't true?"

"I killed another man in self-defense once," Marjorie Lynn said. And the circumstances were not so different. He didn't threaten me

with a gun. We were struggling by a fireplace and he fell backwards and struck his head on an andiron.

"It could have looked as if I'd struck him with the andiron, because my fingerprints were on it. You see, I bent and picked it up. I was confused and frightened, just as I was when the gun I shot Donegan with went off while we were struggling. It took the jury only thirty minutes to acquit me. But it could have turned out differently."

Allen stared at her, unbelieving. "Oh, God, no," he muttered.

"Coincidences like that do happen," she went on bitterly. "Maybe I'm just—well, attack prone."

"Or too physically attractive," Allen said.

"Some women arouse the baser instincts in men. Is that what you're saying, Allen? I doubt if the police would be impressed by that idea."

"I wasn't considering that, one way or the other," Allen said. "When you think aloud silly thoughts pop out occasionally. When did this happen, darling?"

"Seven years ago, in San Francisco," Marjorie Lynn said. "But if it had happened last month in Miami there would be no difference in the way it will look when the story comes out."

Allen reached out, took hold of her hand. "Would it help if I told you it doesn't look as damaging to me as you've let yourself believe? The fact that you were acquitted is important. Legally it couldn't even

be introduced in court as evidence. As for the coincidence—just last week a man was saved from drowning at Miami Beach, returned home and got himself killed in a household accident. As you say, things like that happen all the time.”

“Not all the time, Kenneth. Don’t try to spare me. I—.” She broke off abruptly, drawing the dressing gown more tightly about her throat.

“Listen to me, darling,” Allen pleaded. “It makes no sense to dwell on everything that *could* happen. Usually what we dread most never happens, particularly when it has been built up to an unjustified extent, with fear acting as a prod. We’ve got to think only of *right now*.”

“I know,” she said. “That’s what frightens me. Just tomorrow, just the next few days. The innocent can be hurt as much as the guilty. If you give the police something like this to work on they’ll go at you hammer and tongs. Don’t you see? They’d feel—well, morally justified.”

“I don’t think so,” Allen said. “Will Gentry, the Miami police chief, is a square-shooter. He’d never countenance the deliberate framing of anyone, guilty or innocent. That comes from a reliable source. It’s what Mike Shayne assured my uncle, despite the battles he’s had with Gentry.”

“Mike Shayne told . . . your uncle? I know who Mike Shayne is, of course. But you’ve never told me

anything about your uncle, except that he’s a prominent real estate broker.”

“He might have become prominent in a different way—if it hadn’t been for Shayne,” Allen said. “An accusation was brought against the firm which might have sent him to prison if Mike Shayne hadn’t cleared him of all suspicion. Unknown to my uncle one of the salesmen was cashing in some non-existent property, and Shayne averted a tragedy by exposing the man. Since then Uncle Fred has yielded to no one in his admiration for Shayne. They’ve been close friends for years.”

“I see,” Marjorie Lynn said. “It gives weight, at least, to what Shayne told him about Gentry. But you’re forgetting something, Kenneth. However scrupulous a police officer may be, a little bias will creep in if he’s convinced of your guilt in advance. So what I said still stands.”

“Yes, I’ll give you that—up to a point,” Allen said. “What we need is advice from someone in a position to know just how this whole thing should be handled.”

“What are you suggesting, Kenneth?”

“I’m going to see Mike Shayne. We need help on this—fast!”

II

MIKE SHAYNE leaned back in his big chair and groaned hollowly scowling at the ceiling.

"No, Angel," he said. "A thousand times no. It's final. Nix. No dice. Have a heart, lady. I had a devil of a time in court. I'm bone tired. Bushed I'm crabby as a goat and ready for a drink and a steak. No more problems, thank you."

The brown-eyed girl across the office said, "Michael, I'm ashamed of you. I've never known you to turn down a girl in trouble yet. You just can't start now."

Pert Lucy Hamilton was annoyed and showed it.

Shayne grinned bleakly.

"You look cute when you get mad," he said. "Your neck gets pink and you sort of paw the carpet like a filly who didn't find enough oats in her feed bag. Simmer down, Angel. Tomorrow's time enough to do—"

Lucy Hamilton said, "Tomorrow may be too late, Michael. You've just got to help that girl. If she did shoot Tom Donegan, I'm sure he richly deserved it."

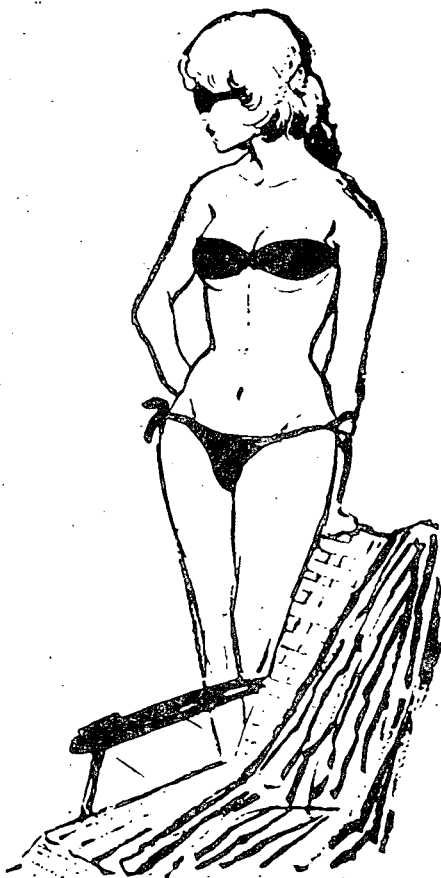
Shayne sat up, the weariness whipped out of him.

"Donegan!" he exclaimed, "The big wheel gambler?"

Lucy said, "Dead gambler. Shot by his secretary. She needs your help, Michael, bad."

Mike Shayne groaned again, but not quite so loudly.

Lucy said, "Her nice young boy friend has been sitting here practically all day, waiting to see you. I promised him you'd listen to him. Now Michael, you've just got to—"



The big redhead nodded wryly.

"What Lucy, wants, Lucy gets," he said. "Hell, Angel, send the guy in. But you'll be the death of me yet."

How true the words might be he was to know all too soon.

A few seconds later he had transferred his scowl to the young man

Lucy had ushered into his office. "You could have brought her with you," he reminded the personable, but slightly disheveled young man sitting opposite him.

Kenneth Allen had left the cruiser in seagoing attire and had not stopped on his way to Shayne's Flagler Street office to comb his wind-ruffled, blond hair.

The detective went on without giving Allen a chance to reply. "There probably hasn't been enough time for the police to draw any definite conclusion as to what happened. Just the fact that Miss Lynn was his secretary wouldn't single her out as a prime suspect, unless someone saw her fleeing from the casino last night."

He shifted about a little as he spoke, easing his big frame into a more comfortable position in a chair that creaked every time Lucy Hamilton let a fortnight go by without oiling the swivel mechanism.

A partially filled cognac glass was at his elbow. He had refilled the glass once while listening to Kenneth Allen's story.

"I thought of bringing her," Allen said. "But I felt she'd be safer on board my boat until I'd had a talk with you."

"Perhaps—a little safer," the red-headed detective conceded, grinning. "Keeping her out of sight has something to be said for it. We don't even know if the police are at the casino. For all we know the body may be still lying there with no one

the wiser. Or it may not be a body. She ran away you say, without making sure that she had killed him. He may have summoned a doctor and be sitting up, cursing her."

"Marjorie says the gun was pressed tight against his stomach. I don't think he could have survived that."

"No, probably not," Shayne agreed. "We can find out whether the police are there or not quickly enough. But I wanted to get everything straight in my mind before phoning Gentry."

He reached out as he spoke, picked up the phone on his desk and uncradled the receiver. He nodded at Allen as he dialed, his face somber again.

The instant Shayne spoke into the phone and asked to be connected with Gentry's office Allen strained forward with an easily understandable concern to catch every word.

It was a two-way conversation that he overheard, for Gentry's voice on the wire had an unusual carrying quality.

In a few minutes the redhead had the Miami police chief on the phone. "I'm sorry, Mike, but I was just leaving. Can't you call me back about two hours from now?"

"I'm afraid not," Shayne said. "This is really three-alarm hot."

"All right, Mike. What do you want to talk to me about?"

"Just why are you leaving in such a hurry?"

"I could say it's none of your business. But I won't. I'm leaving because it's a police officer's business to check a homicide case as quickly as possible. It's just thirty blocks from here and I should be there now, Mike."

"Maybe you can learn more just listening to me."

"What do you mean, Mike? Are you—"

"I think I've got most of the facts straight, Will," Shayne said. "I'll try to give it quick. A professional gambler, Thomas Donegan, is lying dead in his casino with a bullet in his belly. You've just got a full report from whoever discovered the body."

"I happen to know, Will, that he was killed in self-defense, by a woman, his secretary. She's not in my office right at the moment, but I can produce her. She has no desire to conceal anything from the police. But she's had a terrible shock, and she lost her head last night. She went to a close friend for advice. My name came up, they got in touch with me, and I decided to take the case. That makes her my client."

There was an explosive sound at the other end of the line, followed by a silence.

"How close did I come, Will?"

"Close enough," Gentry said. "We just got the news. Someone who works at the casino found him. Three policemen are there now."

"I see. And you're hurrying over to take charge."

"Not after what you've just told me. That can wait until you deliver that woman. Right here in my office, bound and gagged if necessary."

"That won't be necessary," Shayne said. "But I've a small favor to ask. I want to be on hand when you check up on the details. It can be after the body is taken away. But I'd naturally like a look at the body as well."

"It won't be taken away until I get there," Gentry said. "You know that, Mike. I bet she's a damned pretty woman to get Donegan for us."

"Could be. What do you say, Will?"

"All right, Mike. I'll make that concession. But it's contingent on your getting her here within forty-five minutes. Can you do it?"

"I think so," Shayne said. "Thanks, Will."

When Shayne hung up he smiled again. The smile stopped no more than three millimeters short of what would have passed for a grin.

Shayne ran his fingers through his tousled red hair and glanced at his wrist watch. "He gave me forty-five minutes to deliver her at headquarters but we can stretch that to about an hour and a quarter, if we have to. Will that give you time enough? You'll bring her here first, of course."

"I'm sure it will," Allen said. "And that I'm grateful goes with—"

out saying. Oh hell, I forgot something. She's just wearing a bathrobe. But I'll manage to get her some clothes."

Allen got up abruptly but hesitated an instant before crossing to the door, as if feeling that he had not said enough. "This has taken a tremendous load off my mind," he said. "I happen to love her very much."

"I could see that," Shayne said. "It's hard to keep something like that out of your voice. Tell me something. Did Gentry guess right about her. Is she—damned pretty?"

"He understated it," Allen said. "I may have seen one or two women as beautiful in my life. But I'm far from sure of it."

III

FOR HALF AN hour Mike Shayne sat drumming with his stubby fingers on his desk. He was interrupted once by the arrival and departure of Lucy Hamilton, who placed some letters on his desk. She paused an instant to glance with concern at his uptight expression and would have left without saying a word if he hadn't spoken to her.

"What did you think of the young man who was just here?" he asked.

"I brought him right in to see you the instant he arrived," she said. "It was the first time I'd met him. Yet I took his word for everything he told me, and he spoke

scarcely twenty words. You know how seldom I bring anyone right in to see you without buzzing you first. Does that answer your question?"

"Sure does, Angel," Shayne said.

Lucy smiled, turned, and walked out of the office with her shoulders held straight.

Shayne continued to drum with his fingers on the desk top, pausing only once to sip from his cognac glass.

His phone started ringing before another ten minutes had gone by. He reached out, uncradled the receiver and placed it against his ear.

Before he could get out a fully rounded "Hello," Kenneth Allen's voice, raised in frantic despair, came vibrantly over the wire.

"She's gone, Shayne. And it looks like a kidnaping. Everything in the cabin points to a struggle. A lamp and a table were overturned, the rug—"

Jolting as the news was, Shayne remained calm, merely tightening his grip on the phone. "All right. Hold it," he said. "Answer a couple of my questions first. Where is your cruiser? Still riding at anchor?"

"No, it's tied up at a wharf. I thought I mentioned it to you. I'm tied up at the end of a long wharf. Dalton Yacht Club."

"Are there some other boats there? Did anyone see what happened?"

"Three other boats," Allen said. "No one on board the nearest one."

A man was cooking breakfast below decks in the second one. He saw and heard nothing. There are two kids and an old woman with bad eyesight on the one that's closest to shore. She saw something going on, but she's vague about it. Just two or three men walking rapidly along the wharf toward shore. They seemed to be carrying a heavy bundle. But she's stone deaf as well. Difficult to get much out of her."

"How about the kids?"

"Playing games below decks. The boy says he thought he heard someone scream, but he's not sure. Their parents are in the city—left them in charge of the grandmother."

"All right, I've got most of the picture," Shayne said. "One thing more. How many boats are anchored offshore?"

"About two dozen," Allen said.

"How close are they to the wharf?"

"The nearest is as far away as mine was last night," Allen said.

"Unless someone was looking toward the wharf through binoculars—"

"All right, we can't afford to let even so slim a chance go by. We may be able to get something more out of the old woman, even the kids. There's also another possibility. You came straight to my office from the wharf. The chances are someone trailed you, someone who knew what happened at the casino last night and saw Miss Lynn swim out to your boat. For some reason



an attempt has been made to draw a curtain over what happened.

"She would hardly have been kidnaped otherwise. Perhaps someone in the vicinity of the wharf can shed some light on it. Unless we do a lot of questioning we'll have nothing whatever to go on, no slightest clue as to what the kidnapers looked like. Where are you now?"

"In a phone booth a block from the wharf," Allen said.

"All right, go back to the boat. If I hop a cab I should be there in fifteen minutes."

Shayne hesitated for an instant before rising from the desk. He was tempted for a moment to phone Gentry, tell him exactly why he couldn't keep his part of the bargain, and ask him to send two or three of his men directly to the wharf.

But knowing Will Gentry as he did the complications that might

result could have tied his hands in more ways than one, and he was quick to realize that.

Even if Gentry believed him the best men in the department might succeed no better than he could in getting his client back and he was by no means sure that Gentry might accuse him of lying from the start.

Shayne was almost at the door of the inner office when the phone on his desk rang again. He turned back, strode to the desk and picked the phone up. It was Gentry, his voice harshly accusing.

"It's almost an hour, Shayne," he said. "Why isn't she here?"

"We'll be there very soon, Will," Shayne replied, knowing that it might be the wrong thing to say, but unable to think of another way of stalling Gentry.

"Very soon," Gentry rapped. "What kind of talk is that? You gave me your promise."

"I'll keep it, Will. It's just that—"

"Shayne, listen to me," Gentry said, interrupting him abruptly. "There's something I forgot to bring up. The killing you seem to know too much about isn't the first in the past three weeks—or in the past six months—that has a 'big publicity' tag on it. There have been eight of them, all of exceptionally prominent people. John Wilton, the banker, James Snodgrass, the real estate tycoon, Edgar Benton—but why go on? Don't you read the papers?"

"I read about them, naturally,"

Shayne said. "But two or three homicides of that nature would not have been unusual and I wrote the others off as coincidental. Crime waves come in—well, it waves. We agreed once that could apply to the upper echelons as well."

"There's something else I didn't tell you," Gentry said. "You know how I feel about reform groups. Some are okay, they rate nothing but police gratitude. No cop has a hatchet out for civic-minded probers."

"But—there are plenty of phony meddlers, with an ax to grind that has nothing to do with making things better. All they're interested in is enlarging their political following, and grabbing more personal power. There's that new group, headed by Ward Morgan. The Donegan killing is cut to order for him, since it's tied in with a plush-bracket, big casino operation. I'll be hearing from him, the instant the news becomes public. He'll be after my scalp—"

At any other time the mention of Morgan's name would have made Shayne pause for reflection. Even now, despite the pressure he was under, he shut his eyes for an instant, visualizing the man's aspect of grossness. It was unfair to judge any man by his physical appearance alone—perhaps to judge him at all on that basis.

But Wade Morgan was so totally a self-seeking egoist, a power-hungry opportunist, that just listening to him talk for five minutes gave

the lie to the high moral tone of the press releases that appeared under his name in the newspapers.

Gentry's voice on the wire took on a sharper edge again. "Mike, 'I've just one more thing to say to you. I want that woman here—and fast. All bets are off on the promise I made you if you don't arrive with her within the next twenty minutes. Is she in your office now? Tell me when I can—"

"I may have to ask you to be a little more patient than that, Will," Shayne said, and hung up.

IV

THE CAB THAT came speeding toward Mike Shayne the instant he reached the curb in front of the Flagler Street office building seemed almost to sense his need ahead of the driver.

"Where to, sir?" the cabbie asked, swinging about and meeting the redhead's gaze from under a black beret that, combined with his rather longish hair, gave him almost the look of a New York hippie driver.

His appearance did not surprise Shayne, however, for young men of that persuasion were more and more making their appearance at the wheels of cabs in Miami.

"Dalton Yacht Club Pier," Shayne said. "And give it the gas."

In less than five minutes Shayne was breathing in the salt sea air and staring out across a wide stretch of beach flanked by vegeta-

tion running parallel with the road.

He was concentrating on the questions he would have to ask perhaps two dozen men and women in the vicinity of the wharf when the cab jolted to an abrupt halt.

At almost the same instant the driver swung about and pointed a flat black automatic pistol directly at Mike Shayne, one hand still on the wheel.

"Get out!" he said. "Make it fast."

Shayne's hand darted instinctively to the bulge under his coat where a slightly larger gun nestled in a shoulder holster but he thought better of that when he saw the look on the driver's face.

Shayne got out and stood facing the youth, with the gun still trained on him. Quickly the youth frisked him, with fingers so accomplished that the thud of Shayne's gun striking the sand at the edge of the road followed in a matter of seconds.

They were on desolate and completely deserted stretch of beach. But it did not remain deserted for long. From the opposite side of the road two men emerged from behind a thick cluster of fan-palms that provided more shade than the general run of palmettos and crossed in the blazing sunlight to where Shayne was standing.

One of them was fortyish and heavyset, with sharp-angled features that were partly concealed by the brim of a panama hat that descended to just above his eyes. He was

wearing dark sunglasses. The other appeared to be about the same age as the driver and his hair was equally unkempt. He had a long, thin face, pinched in at the nostrils. Although he could hardly have had any reason to dislike Shayne personally his stare was venomous.

Shayne thought for a moment that a conversation was about to ensue, for the older man's lips moved a little as he drew close to him.

Then he saw that he was wearing brass knuckles that glittered in the sunlight. Before Shayne could recoil a step the gun that was trained on him was pressed against his stomach, and the brass knuckles went swishing through the air and struck him on the right temple.

He blacked out instantly, crumpling to the sand without feeling anything but a dull reverberation deep inside his head, as if two gigantic cliff walls had collided and crashed into rubble, with a terrible grinding.

V

MIKE SHAYNE awoke to an awareness of light and sound and colors—zigzagging patterns of changing colors—amidst a continuous swaying. There was a dull throbbing at both of his temples, a dragging sensation in his stomach and his mouth felt totally parched.

For a moment he had the feeling that he was suspended in a ham-

mock, swinging back and forth in a wind that came in gusts, blowing at times with a galelike fury and then subsiding.

Gradually the feeling diminished and he realized that there was a hard surface under him, that he was stretched out at full length on—a floor?

If it was the floor of a room why did it continue to rise and fall, almost as rhythmically as his breathing. He was no longer on land, but on a boat that appeared to be riding at anchor in a not inconsiderable wind.

He was not alone in the cabin. Someone was sitting in a chair close to him, staring down at him. The someone had a gun in his hand, resting on his right knee and the someone was not faceless. It took Shayne a moment to recognize him.

He was the driver of the cab. "We didn't tie you up, Shayne," the youth said. "We didn't think that was necessary. I'm good at guarding people."

"Why?" Shayne asked. It pained him to talk, sent an agonizing stab of pain right through his throat. "Why did you bring me here? Why did you kidnap Miss Lynn? You did kidnap her, didn't you?"

"That's right, Shayne. She's right here with you in another cabin."

"Just who are you?" Shayne asked.

He didn't expect to get an answer, but to his surprise the youth said, "Name's Jim Garson, if that's

important. I don't think it is. Nothing's important to you now, Shayne, except the fact that we'll probably have to kill you. We haven't quite decided on the best way. That's why I'm here guarding you. You drop someone into the sea with weights attached to him, and he's likely to be washed ashore prematurely, just when everything is going smoothly."

Shayne knew that if he waited to hear more he'd have no chance at all. Now he did have a chance. Strength was flowing back into him as it had before in his life when he had suffered as severe a blow on the head.

And the stimulant he needed was what Garson had just told him—and his concern for his client. If they intended to kill him he was quite sure that Marjorie Lynn would not be spared.

Shayne raised himself, until he was supporting himself on his elbows. He tried to look close to exhaustion, despairing, and certain to sink back again in a moment. He half expected that Garson would stiffen to instant alertness, but the test had to be made.

Garson did not move at all, simply continued to stare down at Shayne with the gun resting on his knee, a mocking smile on his lips.

Shayne raised himself a little higher, moaning slightly. Still Garson did not move.

Shayne pivoted about with sudden violence, swinging his weight upward as he came erect, crashing



LUCY HAMILTON

into the seated youth and tearing the gun from his clasp.

He planted his palm on Garson's chest and sent him spinning backwards, upsetting the chair.

In a moment both men were on the floor and Shayne was straddling Garson, clouting him on both sides of his head, not with the reversed gun, but with his bare fists. But his right fist was weighted by the weapon in his clasp and the blows were savagely punishing. Back and forth the youth's head rocked until he stopped struggling and went limp.

Shayne rose slowly. The cabin

wasn't large, but neither was it particularly small. Shayne still had no idea what size boat he was on and how it was constructed.

There was a porthole through which the wind was blowing. Getting to the door fast seemed more important than stopping to stare through it.

He strode to the door, wrenched it open and emerged into the passageway beyond. It was long and narrow. He made no attempt to move cautiously, feeling that the gun was a better safeguard than an excess of caution that would have delayed him in finding out what he most needed to know.

The passageway made a sharp-angled turn and terminated in a brass-railed stairway. Shayne tightened his grip on the gun and ascended a metal spiral that made two complete turns before his hair was ruffled by a breeze from above, and he smelled the sea again.

He emerged in bright sunlight, and stared around him. He was standing in the middle of a wide, swaying deck with a deckhouse looming behind him and casting a squarish shadow over a tangled mass of cordage.

The boat had the look of a small yacht with its pleasure cruising days behind it. Its brass work was badly tarnished and its decks were cluttered untidily and decidedly in need of a scrubbing.

The heavysset man in sunglasses who had felled Shayne with brass

knuckles was standing close to the bow, facing away from Shayne with his shoulders slightly bent. He was resting one hand on the rail and staring out across an empty expanse of water, as if to make sure there was nothing in the distance that could justify uneasiness.

Suddenly he seemed aware that he was no longer alone on the deck, for he turned abruptly and looked in the detective's direction. Before Shayne could dart back into the companionway at his back the silence was shattered by an obscenity and the heavysset man's hand went under his coat.

Shayne had rarely seen anyone jerk out a gun, aim and fire it quite so swiftly. It all seemed to take place in one fluid movement.

Shayne heard the bullet thud into the base of the deckhouse, but didn't turn to see how close it had come to not missing him. The heavysset man started moving.

He fired again while the report of the first shot was still echoing, weaving about as he advanced toward Shayne to make himself a more difficult target.

Shayne fired two shots in rapid succession, bringing the heel of his free hand down sharply on his gun hand as the pistol buckled.

Two yards from the rail the heavysset man stopped advancing. He spun completely about, clutching at his thigh as his gun went clattering.

He screamed and crumpled to

the deck, thrashing about without letting go of his thigh.

Shayne ran across the deck to where he had fallen, with his gun still trained on him. "Shut up and lie still," he rapped. "You're not hurt that bad."

The man on the deck became a little quieter, but he did not let go of his thigh. Blood was seeping out from between his fingers and stark fright looked out of his eyes.

"Christ," he groaned. "You've got to get me ashore and to a doctor."

"Don't worry," Shayne said. "I'll bandage you up right here. But first you're going to do some talking. Where is she?"

"Down the stern companionway," he said. "Third cabin on the right."

"Who else is on board? Where's your long-haired friend? Not Garson. I've taken care of him. The one with the diaper rash?"

"He didn't come with us."

"No? Who else is on board."

"No one, I swear it. Just Garson and myself—and the girl."

"If you're lying to me," Shayne said. "I'll come back and put another bullet in you—a little higher up."

"I'm not lying, I swear it."

Shayne bent and picked up the gun that had dropped from the other's hand.

"First, I'm going below decks to find out if Miss Lynn is all right."

"I may bleed to death, Shayne."

"You won't," Shayne said. "But

I'd advise you not to get up and walk."

He turned and started to move toward the stern companionway, then swung back.

"There's enough cordage over there to tie you up," he said. "Maybe I should."

"No, don't do that. I swear I won't move."

It would have been a hard thing for Shayne to do to a man he'd wounded, and would have to leave unattended for at least ten more minutes, no matter how much such a restriction might have been deserved. And there was something in the man's voice that carried conviction. But though Shayne could not quite shake off the feeling that he had acted unwisely as he crossed back along the deck to the companionway.

VI

SHE WAS SITTING alone on a long bunk with her hands tied behind her, and her ankles just as securely bound. Her eyes looked large and very dark as Mike Shayne shut the door firmly behind him and crossed the cabin to her side.

His first thought was to dispose of the fear he knew had come upon her, for the sudden appearance of another heavysset man in the stateroom, closing the door behind him, could hardly have failed to increase her panic.

He'd rescued more than one cli-

ent in as desperate a situation, but it certainly called for a quick explanation.

"I'm Michael Shayne," he said, without immediately sitting down at her side. "Kenneth Allen came to me, as of course you expected. I got here as quickly as I could."

"Michael Shayne! Yes, I can see that now. You don't look exactly—Oh, God, when you first came in I thought—"

Marjorie Lynn's voice broke and all she could do was stare at him, with a look of overwhelming relief.

Shayne sat down beside her, tapped the cords at her wrist. "We'll get these off when I come back—in about fifteen minutes. There's something on deck I've got to take care of first."

Shayne stood up. "There's a man lying wounded on deck. I had to shoot him or he would have gotten me. There's another badly damaged character in a cabin near the other companionway. One's about forty and plenty rugged. The other's a kid with longish hair. Were they the ones who took you off Allen's boat and brought you here?"

"There were three of them," Marjorie Lynn said.

"You saw all three on board?"

"Yes—and no one else."

Shayne stood very still, staring at her. "Are you sure? Three?"

"They were all here in this cabin, less than an hour ago."

"Well, that does it," Shayne said.

"Stay steady now. I'll be right back."

He couldn't shake off his bad judgment in taking the heavyset man's word. The instant he reached the deck he saw the dory swinging from davits on the left side of the deck, two-thirds in shadow and so close to the stern that his failure to notice it was understandable—it was at least twenty-five feet beyond the companionway. He swung about to see if there was another one on the opposite side of the boat.

There wasn't. Just davits and pulleys and a torn strip of canvas flapping in the breeze.

Shayne cursed when he saw the trail of blood on the deck leading to where the boat had unquestionably been a few moments before.

It was still in sight when he reached the rail and stared seaward, but so distant that bullets from the two pistols that were now in his possession would have spent themselves halfway to the small, bobbing target. He could barely make out two tiny black figures moving about in the bow, and the glint of sunlight on the outboard motor in the stern.

He raced along the deck to the mass of cordage near the bow, disentangled a double length of slender rope, and descended the brass-railed companionway from which he had first emerged on deck. It was only his failure to tie the heavyset man up that had robbed him of victory



WILL GENTRY

and he had no intention of repeating the mistake.

Now it was a double failure, for he should have known that the man had been lying. But that only strengthened his determination to make the youth he had slugged—if he was still alive—speak the truth.

Garson was lying close to where the redhead had left him. But he was groaning now and beginning to stir a little, and had apparently succeeded in dragging himself a few feet along the deck.

Shayne dropped to his knees, and raised him close to a sitting position, flinging one strand of the rope around his shoulders as he did so. He began swiftly to tie him up, ignoring his groans and feeble pro-

tests. There was still a stunned look in Garson's eyes.

The instant Garson was securely trussed up, with cords interlocking at his wrists and ankles, Shayne began slapping him, first on the right cheek and then on the left.

"Look at me!" Shayne rapped. "Come on now, snap out of it."

Garson's eyes opened very wide and took on the wildly frightened look of a man fleeing for his life.

"There's a lot of things you could tell me," Shayne said. "You can and you will. But right now I want to know one thing. In what way are you and your two chums connected with Donegan's casino and with Donegan himself? I'm sure it's a close connection."

"We—worked for him," Garson said. His lips shook and his face seemed to have gone a shade whiter.

"How? At the tables? I've been told his wheels weren't rigged."

"They weren't," Garson said. "We worked for him—in a different way."

"In what way? Come on now, level. I could draw these cords so tight they'd almost kill you. Would you want me to do that?"

"He was holding out on us," Garson said. "Keeping too large a share of the take for himself."

"That's not what I asked you," Shayne said. "But thanks, anyway. It's nice to know that. You were one of his key operators, is that it? One of the inner-circle lads?"

Garson nodded, opening and clos-

ing his lips as if they had suddenly begun to bleed.

"I'd like names," Shayne rapped. "not just one or two. But you can begin with the big baboon in dark glasses who slugged me."

"Name's Prentis," Garson said. "Sandy Prentis."

"And the kid who looks something like you?"

"Tommy Rand."

"And?" Shayne prodded. "I've a feeling it wasn't just a three-man mob."

Garson gave the detective several other names.

"All right," Shayne said. "Now, to get back to the question you evaded. Where did the take come from, if not from rigged tables?"

"I won't tell you, Shayne," Garson said, a look of desperate defiance coming for the first time into his eyes.

"I'm sorry you said that."

Shayne started tugging at the cords. But before he could tie another loop in the one that ran from Garson's right wrist to his ankles something happened that he couldn't have anticipated.

Garson suddenly went limp. His face became blank and he toppled sideways, away from Shayne, like a mummy given a sudden push.

It took Shayne no more than a moment to make sure that Garson had only fainted, probably from weakness, but possibly from fright.

The redhead rose to his feet and left him lying where he had fallen.

There were other cords that had to be untied, not tightened, at the opposite end of the boat.

VII

AS MIKE SHAYNE worked to get Marjorie free—it took close to five minutes—he told her exactly what had caused the delay.

He ended by saying: "Getting back to the coast as quickly as possible is what concerns me most. There's probably a portable compass on board somewhere. I'll have to search for it before we take off in the dory. I believe I can get Garson to cooperate, but he may prefer to take his chances in the middle of the Atlantic."

"If he's in the dory with us," Marjorie Lynn said, "I don't think he'll make trouble. If he doesn't help you to row in the right direction you'll know what to do."

"He's probably been out and back to this boat many times and knows just how far it is from shore. Not that it has always been anchored in the same spot—"

As Shayne was working at Marjorie's ankles he said, "You told me you overheard them talking, once or twice."

Marjorie Lynn nodded. "Once they came into the cabin and thought I was asleep. I tried hard not to look awake. I heard Garson say: 'I'll fire the gun. No hurry about it—only one shot. But we've

got to make sure her fingerprints stay on it."

Shayne's fingers froze on the cords. For a moment he remained still. Then he went on loosening the knots, deciding that there was no need for him to spend the next few minutes explaining to her how startling the revelation had been.

Searching for a compass, important as it was, had suddenly become secondary to what he might find if he went through every cabin on the boat.

What he might find! Yes—and why not? Sandy Prentis and Tommy Rand would have had to move so fast to lower the dory and get away before he re-emerged on deck that they might well have lacked the time to remove anything from below decks, no matter how highly they valued it.

It didn't take Shayne long to discover that the yacht had even less of a pleasure-cruising look below decks than he had anticipated. All of the cabins except three were empty, and the two most cluttered ones had nothing in them but coils of rope, seagoing clothing crusted with salt tossed about haphazardly, and vast assortment of metal containers, oil cans, even some battered beer tins, most of them empty.

But the third was fitted out like a shabby office, with a filing cabinet with rust-jammed doors standing in one corner, opposite an old-fashioned, rolltop desk, also with drawers and what looked like a bureau with

the ornamentation ripped off it.

Shayne found the pistol in the upper right-hand drawer of the third article of furniture. It was wrapped in a handkerchief. He sniffed it without untying the handkerchief. Apparently it had not been fired.

He was very careful to lift it out gingerly.

Five minutes later Shayne returned to where Marjorie Lynn was still sitting.

"There's been no change of plans," he told her. "I couldn't hope to navigate a boat this size alone, even if the engines aren't clogged with rust. But I found a sextant and it's in the dory now. It's a cumbersome affair, only fully reliable when you take the sun's altitude at noon. I've had another talk with Garson and if I should need navigational advice from him I'll get it."

"Are you sure?" Marjorie Lynn asked.

Shayne nodded. "He's still defiant. But he'll see that I row in the right direction. He'll do that in exchange for a promise not to make him trail in the dory's wake on a rope for withholding vital information. I'll get that anyway, soon enough."

"What kind of information?" Marjorie Lynn asked.

"An admission that would probably put a rope around his neck," Shayne said. "You can't force a man to testify against himself in court and he's cagey enough to realize that, even at this stage. I've

scared him into doing some talking. But he's still pinning his hopes on the tricks of a clever lawyer.

"You see," he added, after a pause, "there have been a series of murders recently pretty much on the bizarre side, even for Miami. I found some recent newspaper cuttings in a rolltop desk in one of the cabins which strongly suggest that your former employer was tied in with the killings in some way. They would hardly have been of interest to Garson, Prentis and Rand otherwise."

Shayne decided not to tell her about the pistol. He liked to think he knew enough about women to know how unpredictable their emotional reactions could be when you gave them information of a startling nature.

Marjorie seemed to sense that he was keeping something from her, for her expression became troubled. "You know so much more about all of this than I do," she said. "I don't even know if Allen told you—"

"About the trial in San Francisco?" Shayne broke in quickly. "If he hadn't told me about that coming to me for advice wouldn't have made much sense. You agreed, didn't you, that he was to tell me everything?"

Marjorie Lynn nodded. "Yes, we did. But I thought—"

"Tell me something," the detective said, interrupting her again. "Is there a remote possibility that Donegan, and someone else—Garson or

Prentis, perhaps—knew about the trial?"

"Donegan could have known," she said. "It's hard to keep your past a secret when you've been on trial for your life. He looked at me very strangely at times. Or so I thought. But I may have just imagined it."

"And Garson and the other two?"

"I never saw them before this morning."

Shayne's bushy red eyebrows contracted slightly. "But you were Donegan's secretary for—how long? Four, five months, wasn't it?"

"That means nothing," Marjorie Lynn said. "He had visitors I was never permitted to see. His private office could be entered from the street, by a separate door. Many times he dismissed me early, or simply kept the door that opened on the outer office locked."

Shayne took firm hold of her shoulder and gave it a slight, reassuring squeeze. "We've got a sea voyage ahead of us," he said. "But it will be of short duration. So even if it seems a little rugged, keep that in mind. We'll be heading for the Dalton Yacht Club pier."

VIII

THERE WAS A look about Mike Shayne when he entered Will Gentry's office an hour and a half later, accompanied by Kenneth Allen and Marjorie Lynn, that made the Chief stare at him blankly.

"It was thoughtful of you to have us picked up at the wharf, Will," Shayne said. "I didn't want to suggest it, because I know how busy you must have been in the past four or five hours."

"That's why I sent the van for you," Gentry said. "Did you expect me to come in person."

"You mean you're not that grateful, Will? I hoped you would be."

"Grateful? You've given me some names and a tied-up kid who may speak Chinese for all we know. About all we've been able to get out of him—"

"He's been talkative enough, Will," Shayne said, a grimly sober look replacing the give-and-take expression he usually wore in critical encounters with Gentry before the dust had a chance to settle. "He's holding out about only one thing. I've enough now to bridge that part of it for you."

Gentry nodded, returned to his desk and sat down, gesturing to Shayne with a vague sweep of his arm that somehow conveyed exactly what it was intended to convey. The choice of any standing position close to the desk that suited Shayne would meet with his approval.

Shayne looked around him. He had never before seen Gentry's office quite so crowded. There were two police officers in uniform standing by Gentry's desk and a plain-clothes detective whom Shayne knew quite well and had always liked, Lieutenant Andrew Bricker.



Standing a little apart from the others, his face half in shadow, was a man whose presence had grated on Shayne in the two times he had met him. But never so much as now, for he stared at Shayne without saying a word. There was something almost insulting about such a deliberate withholding of recognition. Shayne refused to allow himself to be upset by it.

Clearly, Shayne reasoned, Ward Morgan whom Gentry had called a phony reformer and a meddler with an ax to grind had heard about the killing or he would not have been there.

That it had delighted Morgan in a perverse way could also be taken for granted for only a power-hungry, political opportunist would regard a killing as a windfall.

Shayne had no doubt that Morgan was rejoicing inwardly, though he was being careful not to let it show in his features. They had the look of stolidity which men with an

inflated idea of their own importance seemed to know exactly how to wear when they did not wish to appear excited.

Shayne would have liked to ask Gentry why Ward Morgan had been allowed to be present. But that, after all, was Gentry's business and it wasn't too hard to picture what might have happened.

If Ward Morgan had come storming in with demands that were upsetting, no matter how unreasonable, Gentry might have decided they could best be disposed of at an open hearing.

Since Shayne had now actually produced Marjorie Lynn and seemed prepared to unreel some vital evidence, information that would appear in the newspapers might as well be aired in Morgan's presence.

Detective Lieutenant Bricker was the first to speak. "I've spent more time than anyone else in checking over the evidence, Shayne. You seem to know a lot about this case that we don't. When you phoned early this morning it was as if—well, that you were several jumps ahead of us. And when you phoned a while ago from the wharf you said Donegan had been shot in the back, and you'd be greatly surprised if we found the gun."

"Wait. Hold it, Bricker," Gentry said. "I think I'd better do the talking. Not that I wasn't about to ask the same questions—"

He looked at Shayne steadily. "How about it, Mike? If everything

had turned out differently and you had arrived with Miss Lynn at my office within the hour we'd have gone straight to the casino. When you looked at the body did you expect to get exactly the kind of confirmation you needed to clear your client?"

"No, I wasn't that optimistic, Will," Shayne said. "I thought you'd find that Donegan had been shot in the stomach, at pointblank range. And I didn't know you'd find the gun missing."

"Well, he was shot through the back, all right," Gentry said. "The bullet went right through him and lodged in the woodwork. Only—it wasn't still there. Someone dug it out and made off with it, so that even if we found the gun we couldn't put a missing bullet under a comparison microscope and find out if it was the right gun."

"But you'd know it was the right gun if only one bullet had been fired from it. You had a suspect with some other very damaging evidence against her, a suspect who could easily enough have dug the bullet out herself with a penknife."

"She would have had to be damned cool-headed," Gentry said, looking at Marjorie Lynn. "But yes—the gun would still be Exhibit A at a trial, and if there were other strong, supporting evidence, such as motive and opportunity—"

"And fingerprints, Will. I don't want you to overlook a single, guilt-indicating factor because my client

is completely innocent. That's why I want you to listen very carefully to what I'm going to tell you."

"Go on," Gentry said. "I'm listening."

"All right. We have someone who could have killed Donegan if proximity and opportunity were the sole criterions—Miss Lynn, my client. Miss Lynn was accused of homicide once, seven years in the past. She was tried and acquitted, on grounds of self-defense. She killed a man to keep him from assaulting her, in the course of a struggle. It was actually an accident. He fell and struck his head on an andiron.

"Seven years later she experienced what had the look of an almost unbelievable coincidence. Another man was shot dead while she was struggling with him. But it wasn't *quite* so much of a coincidence, because she didn't shoot him. Someone else did, from behind. But she thought she had fired the fatal shot, because there was a deafening roar in her ears, and he crumpled to the floor. She dropped the gun and fled in terror.

"The killer picked up the gun, with her fingerprints on it, and wrapped it in a handkerchief. He knew he could return later to dig the bullet out of the woodwork, and was quick to trail her by her footsteps across a wide stretch of wet sand. He saw her either stripping off her clothes, or already swimming out to the anchored boat of a friend—the only person she could turn to

for immediate advice and assistance.

"She told her friend everything, exactly how damaging everything looked, particularly because there had been a similar tragedy in her past. And in both cases her fingerprints were on—"

"Wait a minute, Mike," Gentry said. "Are you asking me to believe it was all planned that way, deliberately in advance? That the killer knew about the earlier tragedy and saw a chance to frame her?"

"I think he knew about it," Shayne said. "Donegan could have known and passed it along to him. But it would have looked bad enough for her without that. As for planning it that way, no. It simply fell into his lap. He came to the casino to kill Donegan and did kill him. But it happened while she was struggling with him, something he couldn't have anticipated.

"It's not easy to buy that," Bricker cut in.

"If Gentry does, that suits me fine," Shayne said. "And I think you'll buy it, Will, when you hear the rest of it."

"We'll see," Gentry said. "Go on, Mike."

"The boat of my client's friend was watched continuously from shore. And when he docked it early this morning and came straight to my office he was tailed. They moved fast then, kidnaping my client and arranging for me to be clobbered. You see, Garson drove a cab. He

used it as a cover on some of his jobs.

"Miss Lynn's friend may or may not have been trailed on foot when he came to my office. But Garson was there in his cab as well, or got there soon afterwards, to keep a double watch. I didn't keep jabbing away at Garson about that, because there were more urgent things I had to get out of him.

"This is what I think happened. They were almost sure that when Miss Lynn's friend got back to his boat and found her gone he'd phone me straight back, and I'd need a cab. When they saw him go to a phone booth close to the pier they were completely sure. So they walkie-talkied the cab and told Garson to pick me up when I came out. They had already taken Miss Lynn to the yacht and returned, leaving her tied up.

"The gun could not have been made to look like the murder weapon, even with Miss Lynn's prints on it, unless a shot had been fired from it. In other words, Will, the case against her had to be made ironclad.

"Now, suppose we shift everything around a little and try to get it into wider perspective. Donegan's murder was planned by the men whose names and descriptions I gave you when I phoned you from the wharf. They suspected, or knew, that Donegan was double-crossing them by withholding more than his share of the take.

"Now what was the take? I had the feeling that if I could peel off the wrappings on that one I'd expose something big. It almost had to be big, because if they had only one killing to conceal it was hard to picture them taking such long, desperate chances to cover up.

"Not only did they try to frame Miss Lynn by making the evidence against her unassailable and kidnapping her as well, to make sure nothing went wrong until they could find some way of turning her over to the police stamped with guilt markings that couldn't be erased. They had some pretty gruesome ideas about tying my hands, to keep me from meddling. You can't do much with your hands tied when you're at the bottom of the sea."

"All right, Mike," Gentry said. "You've made your point. What was Donegan's take?"

"He was an honest gambler, as far as the casino went," Shayne said. "I guess you know that."

"No one can be sure, Mike, of something like that," Gentry said. "Least of all the police. But there have been surprisingly few complaints."

"All right. Take it on hearsay then. I think it's true, because it would be to his advantage to maintain that kind of reputation. You see, he was in the big money heist racket. Heists followed usually by murder, one after another, as you reminded me on the phone earlier today."

"You can't mean—"

"I do, Will. I sympathize with all of your major headaches as they are set forth in the press more than you might expect. The victims make a killing at the casino, leave and are waylaid on a dark street and neatly dispatched, with their pockets rifled and their brains blown out. The really loaded, big, big people, who think nothing of carrying fifty thousand or so in cash around with them before banking it.

"But not always at the casino, of course," Shayne went on, after a pause. "Sometimes when they've left a bank, thumbing over their cash withdrawals. Or at the racetrack."

"Good God! I never for a minute would have—"

Gentry fell silent for an instant, without completing the thought. His jaw had tightened a little when he spoke again.

"Did you get this out of Garson?" he asked. "He won't talk to us. That's for sure."

"He loosened up a bit more on the trip back than he did on board the yacht," Shayne said. "He was mortally terrified by the thought that I might drop him overboard and let him trail fifty feet or so behind the dory on a rope, even though I promised him I wouldn't do that.

"He wasn't as talkative as I could have wished, however. He was still covering himself, didn't come right out and make a full confession. But when I added what he told me to



the newspaper cuttings I found on the yacht, it wasn't hard to arrive at the truth."

"You found some cuttings?"

"That's right. And there were a lot of clues in them you'd overlook if you didn't know precisely what you were hoping to find. Locations. Most of the killings, as you know, took place not far from a bank or some other big money source. Right off I added that to the fact Donegan was mixed up in something big, and got himself killed. And, as I told Miss Lynn, people are not likely to collect newspaper cuttings unless they are of vital interest to them."

Gentry started to say something, then changed his mind and gestured for Shayne to go on.

"That brings us to the gun, Will," Shayne said. "I told you where I

found it when I phoned you from the pier. I also asked you, as you'll recall, whether a small-calibre gun, fired from a distance, could make the kind of entrance and exit wound the medical examiner found. You said it was hard to imagine that the tissue damage pointed to a forty five. Well, one of the two guns I took away from them on the yacht was a forty-five.

"And you know, now, that the gun with Miss Lynn's prints on it —" Shayne nodded toward the small box on Gentry's desk in which the weapon reposed— "was small calibre. You know also that it was never fired. When Donegan threatened her with it it contained a full clip, and it still does.

"It's too bad," he added, with a slight frown, "that I couldn't find the bullet they dug out of the woodwork. I doubt if a more thorough search of the boat or the casino will turn it up. But you can't have everything."

Before Gentry could reply the phone at his elbow rang. He picked it up, listened for a moment and recradled the receiver.

"Prentis and Rand have just been picked up," he said. "Prentis was in need of immediate medical attention and a doctor he thought he could trust got jittery and crossed him up. We'll get the others. Right now we couldn't have a much stronger case, even if we had the bullet."

Ward Morgan spoke then for the

first time, stepping a little forward so that his face was no longer half in shadow.

"It's no case at all!" he protested. "I should have known I'd have to stand here and listen to something that has a cooked-up smell to it from first to last."

A deep flush had crept up over his rather prominent cheekbones. "It's got so a crusader for civic decency can trust the police even less than he can a private detective who tells so many lies that he's forgotten what the truth sounds like. Even when he speaks a few words that could have a grain or two of truth in them they come out twisted—"

Shayne turned and looked at him. "You're forcing my hand a little, Morgan," he said, "because there's not quite enough evidence yet to make the case against you as ironclad as the one your—shall we call them associates—might have made against Miss Lynn if they'd succeeded in framing her. But a successful roundup of all the names Garson gave me should make your conviction a certainty."

"Garson will repeat on the witness stand what he told me for a grant of immunity, because saving his own skin comes first with him. And there's another scared, neurotic kid who should be just as eager to talk —Thomas Rand. Don't count on some of the others not cracking."

"What in hell are you talking about?"

"It' no use, Morgan. Garson told

me more about you than he did about any of the others. You've been using your phony reforming activities as a cloak for the big-deal tiein you had with Donegan. You were in an unique position to cover for him."

It happened so swiftly that no one in the office, least of all the two officers in uniform at the right of Gentry's desk could have done a thing to prevent it. Morgan, beside himself with sudden, uncontrollable rage, made a lunge for Mike Shayne, elbowing Allen out of the way and jostling Marjorie Lynn.

Shayne saw the blow coming and sidestepped it. His fist made a meaty sound as it collided with Morgan's jaw, dropping him to the floor.

For no justifiable reason Marjorie Lynn screamed, and clung to Allen's arm, perhaps because remaining silent during all the time that Shayne had been talking had put as unbearable a strain on her nerves as it had on Morgan's ability to restrain a rage that he should have known better than to succumb to.

It took Gentry three full minutes to clear the office and get everything under control again, but less than half that time for Lieutenant

Bricker and one of the officers in uniform to help Morgan to his feet and escort him, staggering a little, out of the office.

When Shayne found himself alone with Gentry, with his breathing still a little on the harsh side, he reached across the Chief's desk and helped himself to a cigarette.

Gentry remained silent until he had lit it, and flicked the match into an ashtray.

"I don't smoke cigarettes, as you know, Mike," he said. "But that pack was left there by someone as reckless as you are. Tell me honestly, Mike. Do you think we can make it stick? That blow he aimed at you would be worthless as evidence. Before you can charge a man with being an accessory to murder you have to warn him that anything he says or does can be used against him."

"Everything I told him was the truth, Will," Shayne said. "If I hadn't thought you could make it stick I'd have kept mum, hard as that would have been for me. You'll get some strong circumstantial evidence as well, even if they don't crack otherwise."

Gentry was silent again for a moment. Then he said, "Thanks, Mike—for everything."

THE CHARGE IS MURDER by Brett Halliday

It's Mike Shayne!

It's Hard-Hitting!

It's Complete Next Month!

"What Took You So Long?"

Somewhere out there in the darkness they had my friend marked for death. There was still one last chance to save him—and only I was dumb enough to take it.



by EDWIN C. HICKS

ANNIE JOHNSON was a little under fifty, portly, bottle blonde, thrice divorced and a good date if what you wanted was laughs and a good time.

Joe Chaviski had been feeling down, lonesome, and Annie was the very person to bring him out of it. So he called her up shortly before noon and took her to the Sirloin Stockade.

Annie was different from a lot of women. She didn't gossip. She didn't bore you with who was playing around with whom, and what

woman was divorcing what man, and the other way around. She knew, all right, but you had to come right out and ask to get the information you wanted.

After they had finished their steaks and baked potatoes with sour cream, Annie exploded a bomb.

"Joe," she said "I'm not trying to pry into police affairs but what about this Judge O'Connor business?"

Joe Chaviski nearly dropped a spoon of ice cream on the way to his mouth. His big blue eyes were



rounder than usual. "What do you mean, this Judge O'Connor business?"

Annie Johnson looked at him intently. "Don't try to play the innocent with me, Joe. I know they are trying to keep it out of the paper. But it's been all the talk at my shop all morning long. Everybody's talking."

Chaviski's ham of a fist pounded down on the table top, causing the dishes to bounce. "I'm not kidding, Annie. What have they been talking about Judge O'Connor all morning? Let me in on it. Please!"

"Well I declare!" said Annie. "Haven't you heard about Judge O'Connor being kidnaped?"

Joe Chaviski's hand grabbed An-

nie by the wrist. "Kidnaped! Tell me! Quick!"

"It was about 8:30 last night. The O'Connors heard a knock on their door, Mrs. O'Shea, who lives in the same block, told me. Mrs. O'Connor went to the door, and two masked men were there with guns. They forced their way in, bound and gagged both the judge and Mrs. O'Connor. They left a note with Mrs. O'Connor and took the judge with them, allowing him only time to put on his hat and overcoat. An hour later someone called the Patrick home, which is next door to the O'Connors, and told them to release Mrs. O'Connor. The Patricks went over there and found Mrs. O'Connor, released her, and read the note."

"Quick What was in the note?"

"I don't know for sure, but it told them to keep everything from the press. They called the police, and the FBI is working with them, but no word has come from Judge O'Connor. Say, where you going—where are we going?"

"Back to your beauty shop," said Chaviski. "We'll get together again soon as this Judge O'Connor case is over. I gotta get down to the police station." It was the fastest crosstown trip Annie had been on in many a day.

Judge O'Connor kidnaped! Pat O'Connor was circuit judge, a veteran in office, now in his third four-year term and as clean and fine a judge as ever wore judicial robes.

O'Connor was short and heavy-set, a little giant of a man. He was a fearless man. Before becoming circuit judge he had served two terms as prosecuting attorney and had set a record for successful prosecutions for the period he was in office.

Joe Chaviski had always liked Judge O'Connor. To him he was real, down to earth, straight-tongued, and for all that a witty, pleasant little Irishman, who loved his town, his home, his family, and his friends.

Joe Chaviski parked his car in the police lot with a roar of authority. He still carried his commission as an honorary member of the Fort Smith police department, where, before retirement, he had spent thirty years of his life as a rookie patrolman, plainclothesman, detective, and finally chief of detectives for the last ten years of service.

He thrust his two hundred and fifty five pound body against the door marked *Marty Sauer, Chief of Detectives*, and walked into the office.

Sauer was speaking to a room full of detectives and a couple of FBI agents whom Chaviski recognized. He paused in his conversation.

"Okay Joe, okay. Glad to have your help. Been so busy haven't had a second to call you or do anything else except answer this confounded phone. Governor calling,

Washington calling. Talking to a dozen danged reporters and begging them not to break the story until we get things in hand. How the devil they found out I'll never understand."

"May I please see the note?" Chaviski asked.

Sauer handed a typewritten sheet to him and turned back to the others. Joe Chaviski read:

Chick Gunzo and Harlington Hocott are to be freed from the penitentiary and released to lawyer Bruce Addington of Fort Sanders by noon on Saturday following Thanksgiving. Mr. Addington must be allowed to escort the two into Old Mexico and return safely to Fort Sanders. When the two are released to Mr. Addington, the news should be put on radio and TV, which we will be listening to. If we don't hear this announcement by the time stated we will kill Judge O'Connor and the blood will be on your heads. No attempt must be made to capture either Gunzo or Hocott until after their release in Old Mexico and after Mr. Addington's safe return to Fort Sanders. There must be no interference with Mr. Addington's actions and he must not be followed. The day Mr. Addington returns to Fort Sanders, if there has been no interference, Judge O'Con-

nor will be released unharmed. If there is any slip up anywhere or any attempt to catch Gunzo and Hocott, his dead body will be sent back.

The gray hairs stood up on the back of Joe Chaviski's neck.

"What is this, the state of Arkansas or Latin-America?" he said.

"Do you see the fine hand of Mister Addington in this business?" said Sauer.

"Of course," Chaviski snapped. "I suppose you fellows already have interviewed him and he denies any knowledge of this whole thing?"

"Oh sure, sure! Just because he was Gunzo and Hocott's lawyer when they were tried here doesn't make him responsible for a thing like this. Addington told us so himself. He freely admitted however that he is not too unhappy about it. He said a crime syndicate must be behind it. He will be glad to serve as the representative of the Syndicate in the matter.

In fact he's already collected. He showed us a packet of ten thousand dollars in greenbacks, which he says was delivered in a paper sack to his home last night. He says there was a knock on his front door. When he opened the door, there was the paper sack inside the screen and nobody in sight."

Joe Chaviski turned towards the door.

"Where you going?" said Marty

Sauer. "I want you to work with me on this."

"It doesn't seem like it to me," Joe Chaviski said bitterly. He stalked out of the office.

It was the Monday before Thanksgiving, and the wind was cold, with the threat of sleet or snow, but Joe Chaviski didn't feel it. In fact Sauer had burned him up. He had trained Marty Sauer, made him what he was, had worked with him on hundreds of cases, and now here this real block-buster had exploded under their noses and Marty hadn't even taken the time to call him. Showed just how little they thought of a man once he's retired.

In the good old days Marty would hardly have stepped outside to blow his nose without consulting him. Heck, maybe he was only being childish. But Marty had hurt his feelings. Marty knew how much he would have wanted to work on a case like this.

Joe Chaviski parked his car in front of Addington's office building. Addington was leaving. But he stuck out his hand to Chaviski and Chaviski took it. Sometimes you had to stifle your personal feelings when it was to your interest to do so. They went back into Addington's private office.

"What can I do for you, Joe?" He offered a cigar. Chaviski accepted the cigar and the light that Addington proffered.

"Why don't you quash this whole

thing right at the start, Bruce?"

The lawyer grinned. "I presume you mean the O'Connor kidnaping? Well listen, Joe, I spouted off a little earlier today when Marty Sauer and a couple of FBI men came to see me. I told them that more and more things like this could be expected when a man doesn't get justice in a court of law—"

Despite his good intentions, Joe Chaviski bristled. "You mean two men rob a supermarket and one of them kills the manager and is sentenced to die in the electric chair and the other gets life as an accessory to murder, that justice hasn't been done?"

"Ah, my dear Chaviski, you're still a cop at heart. I thought maybe retirement and those gray hairs had softened you, but I see they haven't. Not being a lawyer you don't appreciate the technicalities of a court trial. Judge O'Connor has a reputation of having a lot of horse sense. I've heard that term used more than once when I was shooting the bull with the fellows down at the police station. But he violated so many legal technicalities in hearing the trial of Gunzo and Hocott that to a lawyer it was pitiful."

"Are you saying that the supermarket manager was not shot and killed? That Gunzo wasn't himself shot down and wounded seriously at the scene of the hold-up? That Harlington Hocott wasn't caught with the loot by officers at Muskegon three hours later?"



"A man has a right to defend himself. You ought to know that, Joe. The market manager began shooting at Gunzo first. Gunzo fired back in self defense after he was wounded. If the manager hadn't tried to play the hero he wouldn't have been killed."

"I see we aren't going to agree. But you know good and well that the governor isn't going to release those two hi-jacker killers from the state penitentiary, and it doesn't make any difference who they kidnaped."

"It doesn't? What if I was to tell you that Judge O'Connor's wife is the close friend of the governor's wife? You know a governor can stand like a block of granite—or a block of ice—when nothing personal is involved. But if pressure is put on one close to his heart, sometimes the ice melts, the granite turn into soft clay. Believe me, Chaviski, I have exhausted every angle, every legal tactic to get the governor to stay the execution of Gunzo, a man

who is legally innocent of murder. Perhaps he is a bad, bad boy. Perhaps he is guilty of involuntary manslaughter, but not of first degree murder. Yet he is scheduled to die at midnight, December second, and the governor says he will not act to prevent it."

"Then you are admitting that you master-minded this—shall we call it a new tactic—to save Gunzo's life?"

Addington's grin was mostly a sneer. "Joe, you know me better than that. I'm not implying anything of the kind. No, definitely, all I am saying is that I have exhausted every legal step to clear Gunzo and Hocott. First I asked for a new trial, next I appealed their cases, and finally, after their conviction was affirmed by the Supreme Court of this state and they were sent to prison, I have hounded the governor and the parole board.

"I am simply saying that some master mind—the syndicate somewhere—has brought up more direct methods that are more effective than anything I have been able to do. I'm sorry that old Judge O'Connor is in danger, of course. But if this kidnaping frees my boys and the Judge comes out of it alive, I will be happy."

Joe Chaviski drove by the Annie Johnson Beauty Salon on his way home. He handed Annie two cherished tickets to the Arkansas football game on Thanksgiving at Little Rock.

"I was going to ask you to go with me to the game," he said, "but this kidnaping has come up. It's going to take all hands if we save O'Connor's life. These tickets will get you in, and I know you won't have any trouble finding someone to take you."

"Thank you, Joe," said Annie. "You're a dear. I'll go and have fun. But I wish it was you taking me."

Good girl, Annie. What she said made him feel better, took most of the bitterness towards Bruce Addington out of his system. He went home, fried a skillet full of round steak, made instant mashed potatoes, opened a can of pears, sprinkled slabs of cheese over the pears, and finally topped it all off with his favorite dessert, vanilla ice cream.

After he ate Chaviski sat in the darkness and looked out at the night. Frequently when he wished to do some heavy thinking he sat alone in the darkness. He was able to concentrate better, sometimes, in the dark.

Poor old Judge O'Connor. His situation was desperate. Bruce Addington's brains were back of the snatch, Chaviski knew that, but he also knew he would never be able to connect Addington with it. Just the same he tried to think as Addington was thinking. Addington years ago had been a pretty good egg. He was well in his fifties now, tough, unscrupulous, a man who

was pulling down a neat fifty thousand dollars a year by using every legal trick in the trade, taking top criminal cases in court, handling big land deals in civil court work, assisting in right-of-way transactions for the state highway department, buying up land for taxes himself.

Looking back through the years, Joe Chaviski wondered what had happened to Bruce Addington. He had gone to high school with him, just before the war. Then after the war, Addington came home grimmer and a bit tougher, perhaps, but still a good man. They had gone fishing together in the old days immediately after World War II. Gradually Addington had grown richer and busier and had pulled away from Chaviski completely—Chaviski the humble cop fighting his way up through the ranks. Money and the desire for more money, and a letting down of all character restraints had made Addington the man he was today.

So what? Take Bruce Addington as he now was, the slick, sly sharpie that he had become, still he would never have done anything like kidnaping Circuit Judge Pat O'Connor on his own.

Gunzo and Hocott were big time and probably had hit men working for the Syndicate. The Syndicate protected its own vigorously, where it was the best policy for the Syndicate to do so. The Syndicate without a doubt had told Addington what had to be done and had left

the details of the kidnaping to him.

Addington knew the country, the best place to hide the kidnaped judge and he knew the area people. It was cold, calm reasoning that this must be so. Addington had plotted the whole crime and knew where the judge was being kept. And it also was just as certain that Addington, personally, would protect himself, wouldn't go near the hiding place or be seen with any of the gangsters who had done the actual kidnaping.

Addington knew that the police and FBI were watching every move he made and that they would bug his telephones at home and at the office.

Joe Chaviski slept very little that night. He took four aspirins and got a little light-headed. The only thing that came to his mind in the small hours before dawn was an insane idea of going to Addington's office and pounding him until he told where Judge O'Connor was being held. Then he overslept, and it was after eight before he awoke.

It was 9:30 before he had finished breakfast and cleaned up the kitchen. Marty Sauer was knocking on his door.

"Okay," said Chaviski, glowering, "what do you want?"

"Aw, come off your high horse, Joe. Get in the car. I thought you would want to see a copy of a letter Bruce Addington's getting thirty minutes from now."

"What do you mean Bruce Ad-

dington's getting thirty minutes from now?"

"We got some wonderful guys in the post office, in case you never heard of them," said Sauer. "And all hands are working on this case under instructions from the post office department in Washington and the FBI as well as everybody else. Only remember, when Addington contacts us we haven't seen the letter before."

At Sauer's office a half dozen men whom Joe Chaviski had never heard of were studying several photostatic copies of the Addington letter. A small newsboy had been given a half dollar two hours before by a man to take the letter two blocks to the postoffice and mail it. The letter, addressed to Addington, had a special delivery stamp.

The frightened lad had been pounced on by federal men before he got back on the street. He took the officers to the spot where the man had given him the letter to mail. The stranger was nowhere to be seen!

The letter, on dime store pen tablet paper and addressed to "Bruce Addington, Addington Building, Fort Sanders, Arkansas," was in Judge O'Connor's handwriting, and was as follows:

My dear Addington: I am writing this under duress, with two armed men calling the shots for me. First assure my wife that so far I have not been

injured in any way. I can't tell you my location of course, and I fear I am going to miss the Razorback game Thanksgiving. I doubt if my ornery hide is worth saving at the price they ask. Please tell the governor to use his own judgment and do what he thinks is right. They are making me write this note. They mean business. If Gunzo and Hocott are not freed as instructed by noon next Saturday, they sure as hell will kill me. See that this message gets through to the governor.

*Sincerely,
Judge Pat O'Connor*

Joe Chaviski found a secluded booth in White's restaurant and ordered a double dish of vanilla ice cream. It wasn't good for his weight problem, he knew that, but nothing he liked was good for it and he didn't worry about that any more. He always thought better when he was spooning down creamy vanilla ice cream. Firing up his think process was a painful ordeal. There was nothing like ice cream to give him the energy to think.

In the letter which Judge O'Connor had written there was one puzzling statement, one thing out of place, one word, actually, that might be a clue.

The one word was "Razorback." Judge O'Connor was not an Arkansas alumnus. He was a graduate of the University of Oklahoma. That's

where he had got his degree in law. Once in a great while he might attend an Arkansas Razorback game and this was when it was played at nearby Fayetteville. But the coming game was scheduled at Little Rock, and Pat O'Connor wasn't about to go down there to see the game.

Reasoning things from every angle—O'Connor, because of his small size, had never had the opportunity to participate in athletics when he was in school and had not enjoyed the thrill of athletic competition. He had represented Oklahoma on the debating team and had spent his free time in the libraries.

As a younger man, when he was prosecuting attorney, O'Connor had gone fishing a few times. He had gone with Joe Chaviski two or three times fifteen years back. Once in a boat, the judge had spent most of his time watching the water fowl, looking at the scenery from the lake level, studying the geological formations of the bluffs that bordered the lake in places, or just looking up at the sky, rather than actually trying to catch fish. The judge was a good egg, but no athlete and no fisherman.

Suddenly Chaviski's face brightened. He paid for his ice cream and left a quarter tip for the waitress, a good sign that his mental digging had struck paydirt or at least the indication of a vein of ore. He left the restaurant with a spring in his massive legs, got in his car, and

drove rapidly to Judge O'Connor's place.

Keep the kidnaping story from the press, huh! On the sidewalk in front of the judge's home a knot of reporters were gathered, and three television crews were on hand. You couldn't keep a story of that magnitude, the kidnaping of a circuit judge from the press. Some of the reporters tried to question Chaviski as he started towards the house.

"Nothing, boys I don't know a thing. Just want to talk to Mrs. O'Connor, an old friend. No, no appointment."

Two FBI men were leaving the house. They nodded to Joe Chaviski and went to their car.

A lady whom Chaviski did not know answered the bell. Mrs. O'Connor would see him. She came into the living room immediately, held out a slender hand.

"I'm glad to see you, Joe Chaviski. Pat always thought a lot of you."

"I want to ask you just one question Mrs. O'Connor."

"Yes. Were we planning to see the Arkansas game at Little Rock Thanksgiving? That's the same thing the two FBI men from out of town wanted to know."

Joe Chaviski gulped.

"The answer is no. We have some dear friends in Little Rock who wanted us to go. But my husband, you know, doesn't go in much for athletics, and the only football team he is the slightest bit inter-



ested in is the Big Red of Oklahoma, where he got his degrees."

"You saw a copy of the letter your husband wrote?"

"I did."

"Why do you think he wrote that he regretted missing the Razorback game then?"

"Just his fighting spirit. A spirit of bravado, you might call it. In a sense he was telling his kidnapers they could do their worst, that they couldn't break his spirit."

Chaviski nodded and rose to go.

"Joe, aren't you working with the police and the FBI?" Mrs. O'Connor said suddenly, her voice trembling for the first time.

"In a sense yes. I'm more or less butting into this case because after all I spent many years as a police officer, and I was a friend of your husband. Anything I find out or

blunder on to, if it is of any value, you can be sure I'll pass on to the FBI."

"Don't do it, Joe. Don't go into the case. Please"

"What do you mean?"

"I have friends who are close, very close to the governor. He has agreed to release the two convicts to Mr. Addington, as the kidnapers directed, at noon tomorrow. Mr. Addington is flying down there tomorrow morning. The governor has been in contact with the FBI headquarters in Washington. The network TV and the press associations are holding the story down until my husband is released. Please don't do anything to rock the boat, Mr. Chaviski. I know you will not for my sake, for the Judge's sake."

"Thank you, Ma-am."

"You will promise, won't you Joe?" Now Mrs. O'Connor, who had been marvelously self-controlled, was on the verge of breaking. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Her thin hands were shaking. She was suddenly much older than her fifty years.

"I promise not to rock the boat," said Joe Chaviski.

He made his way through the swarm of reporters, pushing his great bulk through them and mumbling over and over, "Just visiting. Don't know a thing you don't know. Not a thing."

"Don't rock the boat," Mrs. O'Connor had said. Damn it, that tied his hands. It looked like the police,

the Federal boys, every one in the case were going to sell out to the scummy criminals, to the Syndicate, to Bruce Addington.

Okay, let them sell out. Pat O'Connor's life was worth selling out for. But were they saving the judge's life by freeing the two convicts, the killer Gunzo and Harlington Hottott? They must be key men in the Syndicate for the gangster organization to go all out for them. Or somebody was afraid Gunzo would sing, maybe in a last ditch attempt to save that fatal walk to the chair. And if Gunzo started singing, perhaps the particular Syndicate was in danger of unraveling.

Once the two convicts were in Mexico and O'Connor back home safely, then, of course, the FBI, with the cooperation of Mexican authorities, would try to pick them up again. But who knew what kind of cover or protection the Syndicate had arranged for them across the border?

But the thing that really stuck in Chaviski's craw was selling out to the stinkers. Another step in lawlessness that seemed to be taking over the country—murder, street rioting, campus burnings, pressure, hooliganism, and now body-swapping. Let the bums get away with it this first time and the thing would spread like airplane hijacking.

It was Tuesday night. Tomorrow Bruce Addington would complete his deal in Little Rock, and the State, humiliated by the gangsters'

force play, would release the prisoners at noon, Mrs. O'Connor had told him. Chaviski cooked and ate his supper mechanically, a thing he rarely did because he was a man who loved food. But his brain was working faster than usual.

"Razorback" was the key word in the Judge's note. It had a meaning. The FBI boys knew that the word meant something as well as he did. But what did it mean?

After he had eaten and before he had washed the dishes, Chaviski sat down and began to read the afternoon paper. His mind was like that of a zombie as far as the meaning of the headlines was concerned.

He was consumed with the Judge O'Connor case, with the desperate situation Judge O'Connor was in. The governor might try to make a deal with the kidnapers in the hope of saving his life, and the FBI might hold off until given the go-ahead. But what guarantee was there that the judge would be released?

"Not very much!" Chaviski heard himself saying out loud, although his eyes now were on the sport page. The top streamer headline on the coming Razorback Thanksgiving game was: *Hogs to go all Out!*

Sparks began to go off in Chaviski's head. The headline was like turning on a switch to a programmed computer. The word "Hogs" was a dazzling light. He rose and bucked on his engraved Police Special revolver, the gun high school teenagers had presented him

years before after he had saved a carload of them from a crazed killer. He added a shoulder holster and a second gun, put on heavy walking shoes, a wool sweater and parka, stuck a couple of pairs of handcuffs in the pockets of his parka.

He went outside, backed his car up to his fishing boat and trailer and hooked the trailer on tight. Then he drove down town, crossed the Arkansas River bridge into Oklahoma, and headed westward along U.S. 64. He was on his way to Lake Tenkiller, fifty miles away.

Mrs. O'Connor had pleaded with him not to rock the boat. That was the reason he was on the mission alone and not telling Marty Sauer or the Federal men.

Nobody would be watching for Joe Chaviski. Any spies Addington had posted would be watching the police station and the FBI activities. If anybody had observed him at all as he crossed the bridge they would think he was going to the lake for a last fling at bass or a try for crappie. Folks fished all year long in these parts.

Definitely this was a one-man job. And it might be a wild goose chase entirely. If nothing came of it, he would say nothing about it. If his reasoning was right, then the judge's life might be saved—if he still was alive, and Chaviski felt that he was. The gangsters would let O'Connor stay alive at least until the deadline passed, Saturday noon,

because they might need him to write more letters.

Joe Chaviski stopped at Sallisaw, had a cup of coffee and a couple of pieces of pie, and deliberately took his time, talking crappie fishing and duck hunting with several of the men in the place.

It was nine-thirty when he left the restaurant. He idled along the route to the lake. He was killing time because he didn't want to be on the water before eleven o'clock, when he hoped the judge's guards would have gone to sleep. He wasted forty-five minutes driving the twenty-five or thirty miles to Lake Tenkiller from Sallisaw. Finally he pulled up at a natural boat landing two miles above where he was going. His destination was *Hog Island*, near the dam.

Hog Island is in deep water and is only two or three acres in area. The judge knew about Hog Island, and so did Bruce Addington. Joe Chaviski didn't know the official name or number of the island on the engineer's map. In the early days of the man-made lake, fishermen had noted a number of hogs on the island. They rooted and grunted about the island for a season or two, and some of them were fierce looking customers with long, shaggy hair and heavy tusks. The island in the beginning had been the top of a hill that rose sharply from the valley. The hogs may have been some Indian's strayed porkers. Anyhow, fishermen had begun calling the

place Hog Island, and few had set foot on it.

In recent years, the hog had disappeared. But once or twice, when Judge O'Connor, then a young prosecutor, had gone fishing with Joe Chaviski, they had trolled around the island and picked up a few crappie and bass. And Addington had done much of his early fishing in Lake Tenkiller and knew the local name for the island. He also knew that few if any fishermen had ever been on the island because of its almost perpendicular banks.

The only safe landing spots were masked with shrubbery, and the whole island had a forbidding look. It was an ideal spot to hold the victim of a kidnaping and just such a place as Bruce Addington would look for.

A quarter mile from the island, Joe Chaviski cut off his motor and picked up the paddle. He winced at the labor involved of paddling to one of the hidden spots where getting ashore on the island was possible.

His mind shot back momentarily to years ago when he was fishing with a friend on Nimrod Lake. The motor suddenly stopped.

"Well, pick up the paddle and get busy," said his friend. "We got to get back to the dock somehow." After he had paddled for half a mile, the other guy had started the motor.

"How did you get it started?" he puffed in relief. "Get it started?"

said his friend, innocently, "there wasn't anything wrong with the motor. I was just saving gas!" Those were the good old days, and that fishing partner had been dead more than five years now.

One worry after another shot through Shaviski's head as he paddled silently towards the dark blob ahead which was Hog Island. What if his whole chain of reasoning was just a fairy tale—and Judge O'Connor had thrown that in about the Razorback game in a spirit of brava-do? What if there were no connection between the term "Razorback" in the note and Hog Island? Joe Chaviski had jumped at the connection—perhaps influenced by an old story he had heard and knew for the truth.

A man from Greenwood, Arkansas, was stationed in Manchester, England, during his early days overseas in World War II. He wished to tip his folks off where he was located, but the overseas censor would not permit giving names and locations. So he had written his father mentioning the name of a fictitious person as being a star on the hometown baseball team. "I hope the man you mentioned is as good a catcher as Joe Finney was," he wrote. His father got the point, *man—catcher*—his son was in Manchester!

The wind was rising, coming across the water from the west and southwest, making Chaviski's progress with the single paddle difficult

and causing his face to burn with the cold. He pulled the fur-lined parka down over his head and forehead, tightened the collar up around his chin, and bent to his work.

The island loomed up straight overhead now. He could hear the waves lapping against the rocky crags that lined the side of the island.

It had been two years since he had been in close to Hog Island, and that had been in the daytime. Now he moved in through a mass of buck bushes which he thought shielded a landing site, but had to work quickly to push off from jagged rocks. Twice more he mistook his location, and then he was past the bushes and in beside a boat with outboard motor which was tied fore and aft to pine shrubs that grew at the water's edge. His heart took a big leap at the sight of the boat. Looked like he might have hit the jackpot. At least somebody was on the forbidden island.

He tied his boat and eased out, remarkably light of foot for the big man that he was. Once on the island he caught the smell of burning oil, not too far away. The night was dark and the underbrush was thick, but his eyes were accustomed to the darkness and he moved along sniffing as he went, taking his time, putting his foot down gently every step.

He hadn't traveled more than fifty feet when he was at the base of a slab of limestone rock that towered straight up and was the

size of a large signboard. The smell of burning oil was strong, and he could see a tiny flare lighting the branches of trees beyond the slab.

He edged silently around the great rock and stood within ten feet of a sheltered campsite. There was a ten by twelve foot tent, with a burning oil camp stove in front of it, and a man buried beneath several layers of blankets lying across the entrance to the tent. An automatic shotgun lay by his side at the edge of the blankets.

Chaviski moved towards the sleeper like a great cat. His vice-like left hand seized the sleeper by the throat, while his right hand held the thirty-eight inches from his eyes. The man gasped in sheer terror. His eyes opened to twice their normal size. Two hands came up and tried to fight the great hand that was near to making his Adam's apple deflate like an accordion.

"You got Judge O'Connor in there?" Joe Chaviski whispered.

The man nodded his head as best he could.

Chaviski laid aside his thirty-eight and smashed his right fist squarely on the jaw. The blow would have burst a two hundred pound sack of feed, and the gangster ceased struggling. Joe Chaviski slipped handcuffs on the fellow's wrists.

A sleepy voice sounded from inside the tent. "What's going on out there, Levetizzi?"

A head came poking out the en-

trance of the tent. Chaviski conked him with the thirty-eight, and had the second pair of cuffs on him fast. He kicked the .45 automatic the man had dropped, into the nearby bushes.

Chaviski's flashlight found the grinning face of Judge O'Connor, peering out from the top of a sleeping bag.

"Can't you let a man sleep?" the judge kidded. "Turn that danged light out of my face. It's blinding me."

"You old son of a gun!" Chaviski yipped. He picked the little man, sleeping bag and all, from the ground and carried him out by the oil stove, where there was light. The judge's hands were tied in front of him. Chaviski freed him in a moment with a knife.

"I knew that Razorback business would finally soak through that dumb head of yours if you ever got to see it, Joe. What took you so long?"

"You always were the most ungrateful son I ever did a favor for," said Chaviski. "I've a notion to tie you up again and leave you with these guys."

Judge O'Connor laughed. "These two goons have treated me pretty well," he said. "There's a bottle of whisky in that box over there. I could stand a drink."

"So could I," said Chaviski. "The next time you get yourself kidnaped, won't you pick warm weather, please, Judge?"

AN HOUR AND a half later they arrived in Sallisaw—Joe Chaviski, Judge O'Connor, the two hoods, one moaning with a broken jaw, the other groaning about his sore head.

"Should I lock them up here for the night, Judge?" Chaviski asked. "You know those legal technicalities about crossing the state line."

"What state line?" said O'Connor. "They didn't observe any legal technicalities when they brought me over, did they?"

"You're the doctor. What about this character Bruce Addington? I don't see any way to connect him with the set-up, do you?"

"Leave it to the FBI," said the judge. "They know more ways of skinning a cat than an honest lawyer like Addington ever dreamed of."

"The first thing I'm going to do," said Chaviski, "after we get these hunkies in jail is call the chief of detectives."

"There's no reason for getting Marty up at this time of night, Joe."

"Oh yes there is," said Joe Chaviski maliciously.

At the station he phoned Marty Sauer, relishing his sleepy oaths. And, though it was after one in the morning, he placed a second call.

The muffled voice of Annie Johnson answered. "I just want to know if you've got those Turkey

Day tickets to the football game yet."

"Joe Chaviski, I could kill you? Are you drinking? What do you mean waking me up at this time of night?"

"Like I said. You still got those Turkey Day tickets?"

"Yes."

"I was afraid you might have lined up another date like I said."

"No. Joe. I didn't even think of it. I knew you'd find Judge O'Connor before the game. You have haven't you?"

"Well I'll be a bad name," said Chaviski.

"Good night, Joe. You can tell me all about it when we're on our way to the game. Give me a call and tell me when you'll pick me up Thursday morning. I'll be ready with bells on. Good night, honey. Get your beauty sleep."

Joe Chaviski whistled and turned back to Judge O'Connor. "There's some things I'll never figure out Judge."

"What's that Joe?"

"The way a woman reasons."

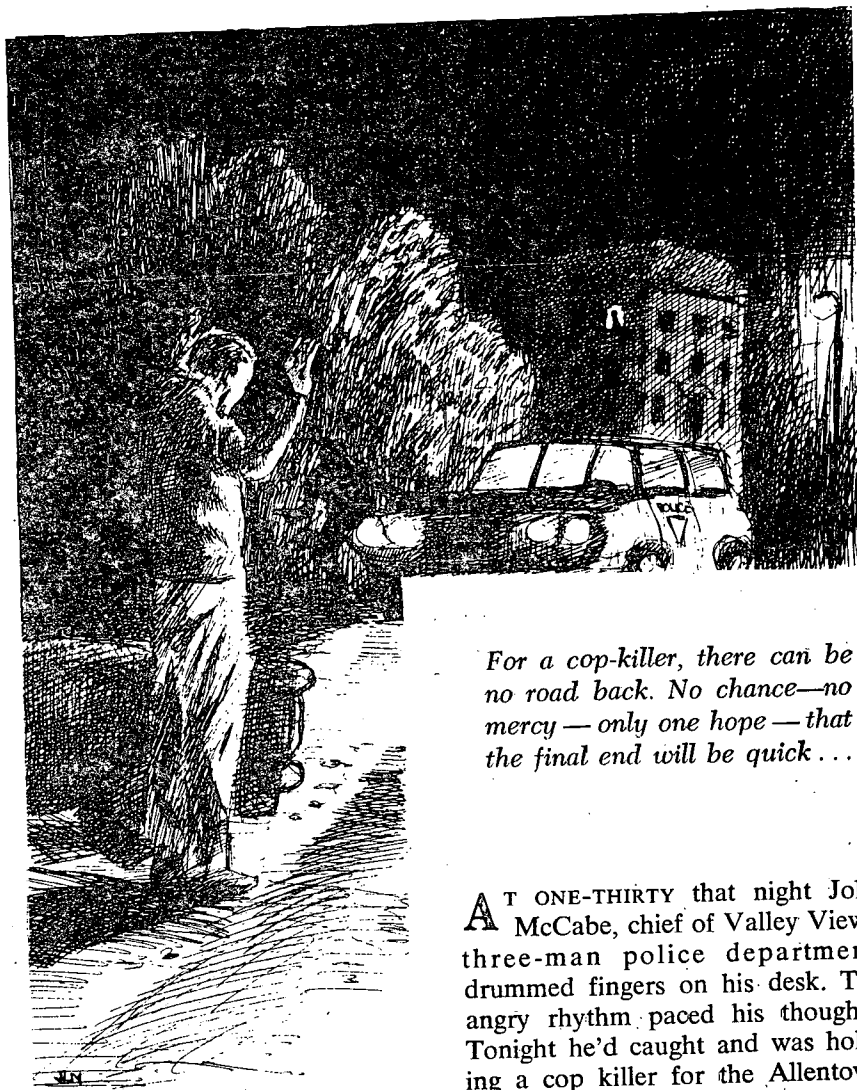
"Call it intuition," said the judge. "Now if you'll let me at that phone I want to report to my wife. I'll bet you five bucks she's sitting right there waiting for me to call."

She was!

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LOSS OF EVIDENCE

by CARL HENRY RATHJEN



For a cop-killer, there can be no road back. No chance—no mercy — only one hope — that the final end will be quick . . .

AT ONE-THIRTY that night John McCabe, chief of Valley View's three-man police department, drummed fingers on his desk. The angry rhythm paced his thoughts. Tonight he'd caught and was holding a cop killer for the Allentown

P.D. whose officer had been killed. Now the suspect might have to be set free to flee the state because he, McCabe, had lost the evidence needed to charge him for murder!

McCabe's gray eyes became bleak as he thought back, seeking some way to close the loophole.

At midnight he'd taken over the graveyard patrol so one of his regular patrolmen could have respite from night duty. Just before one-twenty the radio in his station wagon had brought in an all points bulletin from Allentown, eleven miles east. An officer there had been shot when he'd surprised two men burglarizing an automobile parts place. Before he died, he managed to radio a description of the getaway car. County, state, and all P.D.s had set up road blocks.

Shortly after hearing the bulletin McCabe had spotted a car slipping into Valley View on a byway. Just a glimpse. He wasn't sure it was the wanted car, so he didn't radio for assistance. When he snapped on red lights the car ahead took off.

McCabe, giving chase with siren, was too busy at the moment to bother with the radio. He overtook the car and forced it to a stop on the east side of town. The driver tossed the ignition key into thick weeds, then got out with hands up.

McCabe approached warily with drawn gun, expecting to find the second man crouching and waiting in the car. It was the wanted car all right. Flashing his light inside,

McCabe saw only stolen loot. Frisking the driver and tersely giving the Miranda warning, McCabe found no gun. The suspect, Tony Girardeau, would not answer questions about the car, its contents, nor reveal what had become of his companion.

McCabe put Girardeau in the station wagon's cage, radioed all points he had apprehended one of the suspects and suggested that roadblocks be maintained in hopes of snaring the second killer.

Glancing about the neighborhood, he thought he saw dim figures watching from bedroom windows, but as he stepped toward the nearest house the figure disappeared, nor did it answer his insistent knocking at the door. Sighing about citizens who didn't wish to become involved, he drove a few short blocks to the home of Knapperman, one of his regulars. He quickly explained about the car.

"Get down there and stand by," McCabe said. "If you can't find the key to bring the car in, let me know and I'll send a tow truck."

At the one-room police station in city hall he permitted Girardeau to phone Joe Apperson, a criminal lawyer. Then he locked up the suspect, merely holding him for delivery to the Allentown P.D., which was sending two men to take over the prisoner and the evidence.

And right after that, just one minute ago, the radio had come

alive beside McCabe's desk. It was Knapperman calling in.

"Mac, would you give me the location of that car again?"

"East Locust, between Seventh and Eighth."

"That's where I'm calling from, Mac. There's no car here!"

McCabe couldn't believe it, but he had to. Who? How?

"Check around the neighborhood," he ordered Knapperman.

"Someone may have been watching."

He wanted to go out and look for that car himself. It couldn't have been moved far in the few minutes it had been left unattended. He closed his drumming fingers into a fist. He'd have to warn all points that he'd lost the car and they'd have to watch for it again. Car doors slammed outside as he radioed his embarrassed report. It was a cruiser from Allentown. It must have raced here via the freeway to pick up the killer of their officer.

The door opened as he finished radioing. Captain Hollenbeck, built like a spring steel, thin dark mustache of clipped wires, came in, followed by an officer.

"Nice going, Mac. Thanks for getting that louse for us." He misunderstood McCabe's frown. "I came personally to take him in because the man he killed was a protege of mine. A kid I once straightened out and talked into joining the force."

McCabe stood up. "I've got bad

news for you, Holly, I've lost the evidence you'll need to hold him." His face felt hot as he explained without alibiing.

"By any chance," he asked hopefully, "have you other possible evidence against him?"

"Not a damn thing," Hollenbeck growled. "The only eye witness, our officer, is dead. We need that car and the stolen loot to tie Girardeau to the murder."

"We're looking for it," McCabe said grimly. "And we'll intensify the search, if necessary. It can't be far from where I left it."

"Good," said Hollenbeck. "What can we do to help?"

"You'd better worry about hanging onto the suspect," McCabe hesitated. "I've got more bad news for you, Holly. I let him exercise his rights, let him phone Joe Apperson."

Hollenbeck grimaced. "That shyster probably has a judge out of bed now making out a writ of habeas corpus."

McCabe nodded. "And if he forces you to take Girardeau before a judge before I've retrieved the evidence to show cause for holding him—"

Hollenbeck's officer spoke up. "Can't we stall and say we're too busy to arraign Girardeau before morning? That would give us seven or eight hours to look for—"

"Not with Apperson," McCabe interrupted. "He'll have a judge

dressed and waiting, would even bring him down to the jail."

"Wait a minute. What jail?" said Hollenbeck, staring at a wall map of the county. "Mac, get Girardeau while I use your phone."

Going out a door to Valley View's block of two cells, McCabe surmised Hollenbeck's plan. He'd get other P.D.s to cooperate. They'd keep shifting the suspect from jail to jail to avoid having to accept serving of the habeas corpus writ. It might gain some time to prevent Girardeau from fleeing the state before McCabe found the needed evidence.

McCabe told himself he had to find it! When he returned with Girardeau, Hollenbeck's officer grabbed the suspect and hustled him out to the car. Hollenbeck lingered.

"Mac, while I'm waiting for the car to come back, what can I do to help?"

"You've done plenty already," McCabe said gratefully. "You've given me some time and you haven't sounded off as you've had every right to do."

"What would that accomplish?" Hollenbeck demanded. "You did the only thing you could under the circumstances. Sure, you could have requested a county or state car to come in and stand by. But they would have had to weaken a road-block or give you a long wait."

"I did think along those lines," McCabe admitted. He was silent for a moment. "I hope I'm right in

thinking that car has to be somewhere in Valley View. But just in case, I think you'd better see if you can dig up additional evidence against Girardeau in Allentown."

They both heard a car stopping outside. It was a gleaming Cadillac.

"Joe Apperson," McCabe murmured.

"How'd he get here so fast?" Hollenbeck demanded.

"He lives just outside of Valley View," McCabe said. "He must have gone to Judge Lucas here in town for the writ." McCabe paused, then went on uneasily, "He's got plenty of radio in that car. I wonder if he listened in and knows I've lost the evidence."

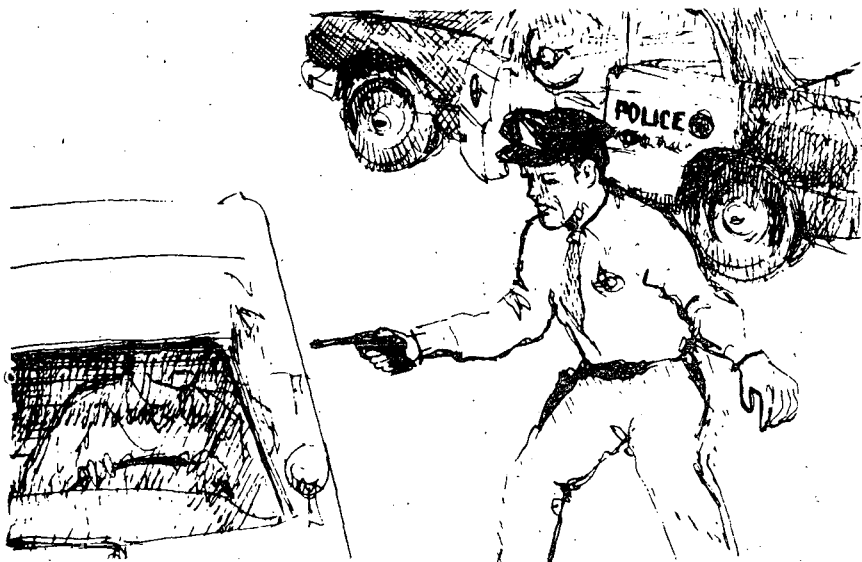
Before Hollenbeck could comment, Apperson came in, rotund figure neatly tailored. The lawyer let a smile slide over his round face.

"Evening, gentlemen. Why Captain Hollenbeck, nice to see you again. It's been quite some time."

"Not long enough," Hollenbeck remarked.

Apperson chuckled. "Maybe sometime we'll meet under more congenial circumstances." He turned to McCabe. "It's been a long time with you too, Mac."

McCabe knew why. Apperson had been busy in federal courts, defending cases of interstate shipment of stolen goods. McCabe wondered if tonight's burglary had been part of a big operation, for there'd been a rash of automobile parts thefts in the southern part of the



state recently. Thinking of that car he had to find, he spoke impatiently to the lawyer.

"What brings you here at this hour?"

Apperson laughed. "Let's not play cat and mouse, Mac. My client, Anthony Girardeau, phoned from here a little while ago." He drew a paper from his pocket. "I have a writ of habeas corpus—"

McCabe shook his head. "I'm no longer holding him on a want."

"Sorry, I should have known," said Apperson, turning to Hollenbeck. "Then this writ is for you, Captain."

"No dice," said Hollenbeck. "My department hasn't got him."

Apperson's smile lost its fluidity.

"I see," he said shortly. "So it is a game of cat and mouse. I should have guessed on my way here when I saw an Allentown car meeting a sheriff's car. I wonder whom the sheriff's car is meeting now."

He glanced at the map of the county as he put the writ in his pocket. He strolled to the door and paused, smiling, especially at McCabe. "It would be silly to wish one another luck in our searches. So I'll merely say, I'll be seeing you."

Hollenbeck spoke heavily when the door closed. "There's your answer, Mac. He knows we haven't got the evidence."

"And," McCabe agreed, "it chops down the time we thought we were gaining." Through the window he

saw the Allentown car returning. "I'll let you know, Holly, if—" He corrected himself. "—when I find that car."

Driving toward East Locust, where he had stopped the getaway car, McCabe radioed county and state to keep Valley View bottled with roadblocks. He found Knapperman just getting in his car on East Locust.

"No one in the neighborhood, Mac, admits seeing what happened to the car after you left."

"That doesn't seem possible," McCabe said, wondering if he were just wishing. He flashed his light at the end of the skid marks where he'd crowded the car to a stop. There were faint dust scuffings on the blacktop as though someone had kneeled and worked there to attach a tow line.

"There had to be at least two of them to tow the car away," McCabe decided. "Get Donovan and half a dozen auxiliaries. Two men to a car. Give them the description. Chev hardtop, last year's model."

Knapperman nodded, though he looked dubious. "It's probably a hot car, stolen for tonight. If they didn't have a chance to unload and abandon it, it's probably under cover somewhere."

"Of course," McCabe said irritably. "So tell everyone to watch for anything unusual, for any car that isn't usually parked outside at night. Remind them that's how we

once pinpointed a case when Doc Coolidge's car wasn't in its garage."

In his car McCabe listened a moment to radio traffic. County and state were tightening roadblocks around Valley View. He also heard a car reporting to Merrivale, ten miles south, that it was finished with last assignment. He wondered if that had anything to do with shuffling Girardeau around. It wouldn't be for long, not with a lawyer like Apperson on the trail.

Preparing to make a U-turn to go searching for that car, McCabe spotted a figure watching from an upper window of the house across the way. He got out of the car, crossed the street, and pounded insistently on the door.

"Who is it?" a woman's voice inquired querulously from the window above.

McCabe stepped back so his uniform could be seen. "Police Chief McCabe. I want to talk to you a moment. Will you come down, please?"

"I told your man a few minutes ago that I didn't see anything going on."

Not much, thought McCabe. She was watching when he'd stopped the fugitive car. Just now she'd been watching his confab with Knapperman. So there was a good chance she'd seen the in-between happening when the car had been taken. Restraining his impatient anger, he kept his voice calm.

"Who is at home with you?"

"Nobody. I live alone. Now will you please—"

McCabe interrupted. "That's all the more reason why you'd better let me talk to you. It's for your own safety."

Finally she moved away from behind the screen. He waited a long time, time he couldn't afford, and he was just beginning to think she was going to ignore him when he heard bolts sliding back and a chain being removed. A weak light in the hall haloed her frowsy hair as she clutched a worn robe to her frail figure.

McCabe stepped inside onto a tattered rug and removed his cap. Her faded eyes avoided his.

"I don't know what you want with me. I'm just an old woman, living alone, trying to hold body and soul together."

"Do you have a telephone?" McCabe asked abruptly.

She shook her tousled head angrily. "You could have asked me that from outside—"

McCabe cut in quietly. "Then, if you needed help, you'd have to call out the window." He paused, then went on with quiet firmness. "You'd have to hope that at least one of your neighbors would be willing to become involved by calling us, the police. A lot of police work is dependent on that kind of willingness because we can't be everywhere at once."

He paused again. "We need your help, your willingness to become in-

involved. Just what did you see out there when that car was taken away?"

Her colorless lips pressed together. "I'm an old woman, living all alone here."

"You won't be alone. No one will annoy you," McCabe assured her. "I'll have a police car stationed in this neighborhood until we capture the men we're after. You have my promise on that."

He hoped it wasn't a false promise. The faded eyes studied him. She seemed to be getting her breath, or was it her courage?

"Another car came," she murmured. "Two men got out. They tied a rope to the first one and pulled it away."

McCabe tried to hold down his excitement. "Can you describe that second car or the men?"

"It's dark out there, and I was looking through a screen. It was just another car. I don't know what kind or color it was. The man who drove it, he'd make three or four of me."

"Fat?" McCabe asked.

She nodded slightly. "He couldn't seem to bend down enough to tie the rope. The other man had to do it and I heard him, the fat man, keep asking the other one what happened. But the other one didn't answer."

McCabe nodded. He knew some of the answers and he'd get the rest of them.

"You've been a big help, and I appreciate it," he said to the old

lady. "Now lock your door and go back to bed. I'll stay out front until there's another car in the neighborhood to keep an eye on you."

He radioed for Knapperman and a car of auxiliaries to join him. When they arrived he asked if any of them knew of a fat man living in this area of town. They shook their heads.

"He must be a newcomer then," McCabe said. He turned to the auxiliaries. "Keep circling this block and the alley. Don't let anyone near that house across the way. Don't be drawn off. Stand by that old lady no matter what else happens in the area."

Knapperman waited until the auxiliaries had left. "You sound as though you've got this pinpointed, Mac."

McCabe sighed. "I wish I could agree. I'm just a little closer, that's all." He nodded toward the old lady's house. "She told me the fat man wanted to know what had happened. That suggests he wasn't with the other two on the job tonight at Allentown. He came into this mess after Girardeau and the other killer got back to Valley View."

McCabe paused, peering along Locust toward Allentown. He pointed. "The fat man has got to be near the bend about a half-mile from here. When I came around that bend in pursuit of the Chev it struck me that I'd closed up on it pretty fast. Now it dawns on me it must have slowed down around on this

side for Girardeau to let his pal scramble out."

"To get the fat one," Knapperman agreed excitedly. "I think you've got it, Mac."

McCabe didn't answer, turning his head to listen to the radio. It was the Allentown dispatcher calling McCabe's number. When McCabe answered, the dispatcher gave him "1021" . . . *use a telephone, not the radio.*

"While I'm phoning," he told Knapperman, "you have a look-around near the bend."

Driving rapidly to city hall he telephoned the Allentown P.D. Captain Hollenbeck came on the line.

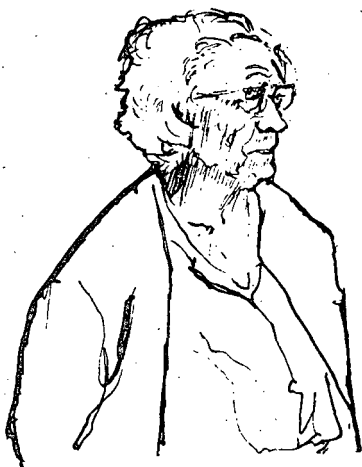
"Sorry to interrupt you, Mac, but I thought you ought to know Apperson's crowding us on Girardeau. He's got men staked out on every P.D. and jail in the county. Some of them are tailing patrol cars. It's only a question of time before he serves that writ on whoever is holding Girardeau."

"I'm getting closer too, I hope," McCabe said. "I take it you haven't found any additional evidence at your end."

"We fine-combed the burglary site. Nothing. We've got the slugs that killed our officer, such as they are after piercing his windshield first."

"But you need guns to try to match them to," McCabe said grimly.

"And," Hollenbeck went on,



"we've got a rundown on the license number you gave us after apprehending the Chev. I've got men out now checking with the owner, but if he didn't know until now that his car was stolen—"

McCabe prodded the station wagon back to East Locust, aware that everything depended on what he could find, or rather, retrieve. Just this side of the bend he found Knapperman's car with blinkers flashing and headlights shining on skid marks where Girardeau must have braked hard to let his companion out. But there was no sign of Knapperman.

A chill went through McCabe. He should have told his patrolman not to make any serious move alone. Then he heard a door close and saw Knapperman hurrying down a dark walk.

"Friend of mine lives there, Mac, but he doesn't know of any fat man in this neighborhood."

McCabe's gaze went to either side of Locust. "He must be somewhere close by. Girardeau must have realized I was going to overtake him, so he and his pal quickly cooked up a scheme to toss out the key in hopes that, being a small P.D., I might have to leave the car and evidence briefly unattended."

McCabe's gray eyes probed around again. "Girardeau's pal had to dash to the fat man. There's no public phone around here he could have used, and they had only minutes to grab that Chev. And they probably took it to wherever the fat man was staying. It's got to be somewhere in this area. You take the streets and alleys west of Locust. I'll take the east. If you spot anything, don't do anything except call me."

McCabe, sweating, thinking of Apperson getting closer to obtaining Girardeau's release, fought down the temptation to drive fast. He idled the station along streets, through alleys. Now and then he beamed his spotlight up a driveway or into a backyard. Dogs barked. Floodlights went on back of one house. McCabe backed the car quickly and went to the door.

A man in pajamas answered, speaking through the slight opening permitted by a chain bolt. The way he stood suggested he had a gun in hand. McCabe, vaguely recog-

nizing him, quickly identified himself.

"Sorry I distrubed you. But do you know of any new people in the neighborhood, particularly a very fat man?"

"I've been away on a job, Chief, working on that new dam up north."

"Maybe your wife," McCabe began.

"She was with me, Chief. We took the house trailer up there." McCabe was turning away when the man spoke again. "Wait a minute. My wife was yakking on the phone when we got home, renewing acquaintance with neighbors. Maybe she heard something about new people."

McCabe waited, trying not to think of time getting away from him. The man came back, this time empty-handed.

"She's not sure, Chief, but she thinks someone mentioned there's been some activity by the old place around the corner that's stood vacant for so long."

"Thanks a lot," said McCabe. "I'll take a look over there."

Driving around the corner he cruised slowly past a dark weary-looking house. Trees lining the driveway had been pruned and limbs cluttered the overgrown front lawn. It was a former farm now squeezed in by sub-division. Back of the house was a barn that could have concealed half a dozen cars.

McCabe went on to the next corner, turned it, then called Knapper-

man to meet him. They went to the door together, standing to either side of it as McCabe knocked, and knocked. Finally a man answered angrily.

"What do you want?" he called through the door.

"Police officers," McCabe replied. "We're checking out a problem in the neighborhood. Perhaps you could give us some information."

"I don't know anything about my neighbors."

The corner of McCabe's eye saw Knapperman's hand moving closer to his holster. He kept his voice calm, matter-of-fact.

"It's not a question of knowing your neighbors, sir. But surely you must have noticed what we're seeking confirmation of. Will you open the door so I don't have to speak so loud, advertising what we're seeking?"

McCabe waited. Was it indecision inside that door, or was a blazing reception being planned? Knapperman's hand loosened his revolver, then rested slightly away from it. The door opened wide. McCabe tensed inwardly. The wideness could make him a target for someone farther back in the dark house. The man who opened the door was of medium build and tow-headed, not at all fat. He stood to one side of the opening.

"Well, what is it?"

McCabe thought fast. "We've had reports of young people in the area

slipping into barns and garages at night for beer and pot parties and so forth."

"I haven't seen anything like that," said the towhead.

"You've got a large barn," McCabe said. "May we have your permission to check it?"

"No need to. No one would get in there. I've got a nasty-tempered German shepherd out there." The towhead started to close the door.

McCabe put out his hand slowly. "Have you lived here long? Are you alone?"

"Got a wife and kids. They'll be here in a few days. I came on ahead to get the place ready for them." He gestured to the pruned limbs out front.

McCabe nodded. "Thanks. Sorry we had to bother you."

When they reached the driveway, Knapperman flashed his light on the barn. No dog barked. McCabe murmured

"Notice how these trees are pruned. Just on the driveway side, not all around."

Knapperman slid his gaze upward. "High enough to let a truck in."

McCabe thought of all the recent automobile parts thefts. Was all that loot stashed in the barn along with tonight's twice-stolen Chev?

Back in the station wagon and driving to where Knapperman had left his car, McCabe told his patrolman to keep an eye on the place.

"I'm going to Judge Lucas for a search warrant."

Then the Allentown dispatcher called McCabe's number. Captain Hollenbeck came on the air.

"Mac, Apperson caught up to Girardeau and served the writ. The suspect is being brought into Valley View for an immediate hearing before Judge Lucas."

"Stall the hearing," McCabe snapped. "I'm positive I've got the place to retrieve the evidence and a lot more. I'm on my way for a search warrant now." He didn't sign off, but went right on. "All Valley View and all available county and state units, close in to the area of . . ."

He gave the location of the house he had just visited. Then, grimacing, he stood on the brake. "My second boner tonight. I should have told them to listen on secret frequency."

Knapperman winced. "If that cop killer and fat man were listening in—"

McCabe drowned him out with a squall of tires in a U-turn. He gunned the station wagon back toward the old house. His headlights swept into the drive and caught the towhead racing for the barn. A fat man in denims lumbered after him. The towhead whirled with a gun.

"Watch it!" McCabe barked, opening his left door and hurling himself out.

Knapperman went out the right side as slugs smashed through the windshield the same as they had in

Allentown earlier that night. McCabe and Knapperman downed the towhead in a crossfire. The fat man stood quivering with hands up-raised. While Knapperman covered him, McCabe went to the towhead. Dead.

They didn't have to ask the fat man any questions. Words flowed from him like his sweating fear. He "didn't know nothing" about the killing in Allentown until just a little while ago. While the others were out pulling jobs he just stayed here to keep anyone from discovering the loot from previous burglaries. They were planning to ship it all out after tonight's job. He showed McCabe into the barn with the getaway Chev, still holding tonight's loot. Another car was there, still linked to the Chev with a tow rope. And a cache of stolen parts.

Leaving Knapperman, Valley View auxiliaries, state and county officers at the former farm, McCabe drove the fat man to the home of Judge Lucas. It was a brief hearing, and Girardeau was not released. Captain Hollenbeck took over the two prisoners.

"See you at the trial," he called to Joe Apperson. "And thanks to Mac I feel sure this is one you can count on losing."

Apperson managed a smile.

"You can't win them all," he admitted, "but I'll try." He turned to McCabe. "Congratulations, to this point anyway, Mac. No hard feelings, I hope."

"We each had our jobs," McCabe said, "and every man is entitled to a fair shake, if he deserves it. But there's just one thing puzzles me about your side of it."

He glanced after Hollenbeck's car taking the cop killer and the other prisoner toward Allentown. "Why do you work for them when you know what they are?"

Apperson pursed his lips. "You just said part of it. A fair shake. As for the rest of it—well, I like expensive living and they're willing to pay." He smiled. "It's getting close to time for breakfast. Be my guest, Mac?"

"Not this morning," said John McCabe. "I'm planning to pick up some things for breakfast with a friend. A little old lady."

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A TRIP TO THE ISLANDS

*A kill-for-pay man gets many strange jobs,
but this one was the strangest of all.
For the man slated to die was — me!*

by EDWARD Y. BREESE



CAPTAIN RYAN of the Miami Homicide Division leaned back in my own best leather armchair and laughed at me.

"I don't believe it," I said. "Captain, you know entrapment won't stand up in court."

"I've waited three years to shake you up, Johnny," he said. "Now I almost think I've made it. This isn't entrapment, and I'm not drunk. It's a sober, serious request I'm making."

"Even if you're serious, it's still way off the beam," I said. "I'm no

contract man, Captain. I don't kill for hire."

That's true, so help me. I'm Johnny-Hawk, and I've killed men; but never for money, never on anyone's order. I make a good living because I'm willing and able to do the things people either can't or won't do for themselves.

I kill those who get in the way, but only when I believe in what I'm doing, and the people insist on getting killed. You can't buy me to knock over your enemy. This way I can sleep well of nights.

Featuring
JOHNNY HAWK



Ryan knew that.

"Of course you don't," the captain admitted. "Except you killed on order in Korea and drew your pay. This job we want you to do"—he indicated the man who'd come in with him—"doesn't carry a uniform, but it ought to. My friend here speaks for Uncle Whiskers. It's a front line job, just the way it was when you wore sergeant's stripes."

"Who is he?"

The man was quiet and average, from thinning hair to blue suit and black cordovan shoes. Everything was average until you saw his eyes. They could look right through and count my vertebrae. He seemed perfectly at ease, but I wouldn't have wanted to have to jump him right then. One pro knows another.

"You're better off not knowing," he said. "Captain Ryan knows I'm the genuine article. I think you trust him."

"I always thought I could. This just doesn't make sense, though. You want me to sign on to assassinate the premier of a perfectly friendly little two-for-a-dime country. Why? I have to know why."

"Fair enough," the quiet man said. "That two-for-a-dime island has a couple of first class airports. It has scrub mountains and jungles where missile pads could be hidden like pins in a sponge. We need to know it isn't controlled by the wrong people."

"Premier McKenzie is the wrong people?"

"Probably not," he said. "Our own oil companies down there backed him for the job. He's an Oxford graduate and all the rest. We don't necessarily want him killed."

"All you actually said," I agreed, "was that you want me to take a contract to kill him. Are you the ones who're putting out this contract? And if so, why me?"

"We're not the ones," Mr. Government said quietly. "We know from our own sources that it's going to be offered you. One of the things we want you to do is find out who's back of it on the island itself."

"The hit," Ryan amplified, "is being placed directly through a man who operates as sort of an international hatchet man. We're not even sure who he's working for right now. We want you to find out."

"Who is Mr. X?"

The quiet man smiled. "A good name for him. We just don't know for sure. He's a little old man. At times he calls himself Brown or LeBlanc or Smith or Berger or some simple name. He's friendly as a rabid bat and about as dangerous as a bubonic plague carrier. That much we do know. We think his side wants to take over the island—and the simplest thing to do is kill McKenzie for an opener."

"And if I'm taken or killed at the same time," I said, "the job can be blamed on the United States. Have you thought of that?"

"We have," he assured me. "We weren't sure whether you would or not."

"Johnny's smart," Ryan said. "I told you that."

"Yes," I said. "I'm smart enough to know Mr. Berger-Jones stands to gain by seeing to it I don't get clear. Is that why you picked me? I'm more expendable than your regular operatives?"

"You do us an injustice," Mr. G said. "In the first place *we* didn't pick you for the job. X did that for reasons of his own. We just heard about it. We're here because we figure you're honest enough to work with us and just tough enough so you might be able to do our job. We know it's very risky. If you do this at all, you'll have to volunteer after you hear us out."

"You're right on the first count," I said. "I favor my own country."

"We want you to agree to the job and go down there," Ryan said. "Of course you don't actually kill McKenzie. Your real job is to find out the head of the local conspiracy, the top island man working for the commies. So far he's hidden his tracks. We can't be sure which one of three or four it is. He must be in on this. When you find out, get the name out to us. Get yourself out with it. That will give us time to act before they set up another killer."

"What cover will I have?"

"Practically none. If you're caught, we never heard of you. We can't even warn McKenzie. The man we

want is probably very close to him and might find out."

"Gee, fellas," I said. "Thanks."

"You can elect out of this, Mr. Hawk," the man said. "I'm trying to be honest with you. One thing we *can* do. Our agents on the island will help if they can. We'll set up an escape route, if you can make it. You'll be thoroughly briefed first, of course. Right now we can give you a day or so to think things over."

"If you do," I said, "I'll think myself out of it."

"I won't blame you," the agent said. "To agree means getting involved to the point where your life is on the line. The odds you get back aren't good."

"I know that," I said. "It seems to me as long as somebody on the other side can kill ninety million of us by pushing the launch button, my life is on the line in any case. Mister, I figure I was born involved in this thing. We all were. Only Johnny Hawk will be one of the ones who fights. Only a sheep sits and waits to get its throat cut."

"You're in?"

"I'm in. Let's get on with the briefing."

FOR TWO DAYS they did just that. I think they told me all they knew, though that may not have been allowed. I know I did get a thorough break-down on their escape route. Our side had had an air base close to the island capital back in Big

War Two. Of course we'd made a present of it to their government, but there were still people there who worked for us. Also there were local people still taking the Yankee dollar when they could get it.

I studied local politics and street maps, aerial surveys and pictures of the city and its buildings. I put some local money and some foreign gold in a money belt. I checked over my specially accurized Colt's New Service .45 and hand-loaded a new batch of 300 gr. soft nosed slugs.

The only hold-out weapon I took was a fountain pen that concealed a four-inch stiletto blade. They replaced one of my suspender buttons with a special electronic unit that I could activate to broadcast a constant beep signal.

"If you're running or hiding," the agent told me, "our search and rescue people can home in on this. We'll try to send a boat or helicopter in for you. Don't use it unless you have to. We only hope the others won't watch this frequency."

The rest of my equipment traveled where it always did—well packed inside my skull. In the long run a man has only brain, guts and hands to trust. Anything else he carries for weapon is just frosting on the cake. In 1,000,000 B.C. he had only the three. They've brought him all the way to now.

After two days they broke contact. I went about my regular business of enjoying life, and waited for

the bogeys to make their initial move.

They obliged within the week. Their advance man sat down at my table in the Latin Room of one of the biggest beach hotels. He wasn't small and dark and sinister. In fact he looked like an insurance salesman from Detroit.

"Mr. Hawk," he said, "I want to talk business with you."

"My name is Sam P. Sheepdip," I said. "I never talk business over dessert."

This one had humor enough to smile.

"I don't make mistakes," he said, lightly enough. Then: "Would you care to talk fifty thousand dollars after you finish?"

"For that much I'll break a rule," I said. "You can start telling me about it right now."

"I don't talk about it at all. I just take you to somebody who does."

We stuck to small talk while I finished eating. After that he put me in a foreign sports car and we rode a few blocks to an even larger and more expensive hotel.

"Mr. Big Business does well by himself," I said in the lobby.

My guide just smiled to himself and took me up in the elevator to one of the bigger suites. In the hallway he asked, politely enough, for my gun. I gave him the .44 deringer I had in a waistband snap holster. It was all I was carrying.

Inside the suite I got my shock of the week.

His principal was tall and slender and most intensely feminine. She was dark and willowy, perfumed and beautiful, wearing a gold brocade Indian sari and earrings carrying about four carats of diamonds and emeralds to each ear. She was probably near my own age, but could have passed for half of that whenever she wanted. The poise and grooming were so good she had to have been born to them.

"You are Mr. Hawk, of course," she said extending her hand to be shaken. "I'm Alicia Hari. My father is Colonel Hari, commandant of constabulary in my country. You may have heard of him?"

"I'm sorry," I said. I gave her a long look. "I'm truly sorry."

The woman in her knew I meant it. She wasn't distracted. "This is strictly a business proposition, Mr. Hawk."

She led me over to a wide couch, facing windows that looked out across the night-darkened sea. Cleancut-and-handsome sat over by the door where he could see and not hear.

Alicia came right to the point. This was the contact I'd been waiting for. Of course the picture was colored differently than the way Captain Ryan and his friend had put it.

Certain patriots in their island nation had determined that Premier McKenzie, Head of State since in-



dependence from the British Empire, had sold out to an Asiatic power. McKenzie was a mulatto and immensely popular with the colored people who made up seventy percent of the population. This being so there was not enough evidence to try and convict him over the protests of his fanatical personal following.

Miss Hari and her father represented the natives of Hindu ancestry and, she implied, the British merchants and officials. An inner group of these people had decided that a simple assassination was necessary, "to save our island for democracy and the western alliance".

Her story was good, and she put it across smoothly. No names were used except her father's. Somehow it was implied that the American

Intelligence interests were also in favor of the killing. She didn't actually say so in so many words.

"This is only background," she told me. "We have a simple business proposition for you, Mr. Hawk. The politics of it need not really concern you."

I waited with a poker face.

"Say the word and twenty thousand dollars will be put in your account at any Miami bank you name. You will go to our island with me. Through my connections I will arrange that the Premier receives you. After you kill him, we'll get you out of the country. When you board a boat to return to America, you get thirty thousand more in cash. Simple enough?"

"Oh, certainly," I said. "But first tell me how I get to that boat. I'm sure there'll be an open season on Johnny Hawk as soon as I pull trigger. What about guards and so forth?"

"You'll have to leave that to us," she said. "We won't let you be taken or killed. One way you'd talk, the other you could be identified and the connection with us possibly traced. No, Mr. Hawk, it's not to our interest to have you stopped."

I haven't lived this long by swallowing that sort of speciously frank and open logic. I could see all sort of ifs, ands and buts that I'd normally have questioned. This time my promise to Mr. Whiskers made me go along.

"It makes sense," I said. "Be-

sides I gather your side will be in control once the man is dead."

"That's right. My own father commands the constabulary. There will be much dust raised hunting you along the wrong roads."

"At least the price is right," I said. "I'll go back to my place for clothes and equipment. When do we start?"

Her eyes were steady, but her mouth laughed at me. "We can't let you go anywhere, Mr. Hawk. Perhaps you talk in your sleep. No, no. You stay here till all is ready for us to go. I can promise you'll be comfortable."

So far things had been too easy for everybody.

"I get my own gun and other things," I said, "or you do your own killing. We're not talking about a tennis match, Miss Hari. Presumably you're hiring me because you think I know my business better than anyone else you've got. Let me do it my way."

Her manner changed just enough to let me see the iron hand under the velvet glove. "Don't be foolish, please. You know I can't take chances. You can tell my friend what you want and let him go for it."

I laughed. "And how does he explain to the apartment manager why I gave him a key? And why I won't be back? That's not my m.o., and everybody knows it."

"We can't let you go alone. That's not *our* modus."

"Then compromise. He can come along with me, though there's really no need. You should know my word's good. By the way, how did you hear about me?"

"You're a well known man, Mr. Hawk. Let's just say an anonymous admirer of yours told us." She got up and went and stood by the window to think it over. Suddenly: "All right. You must trust us, so we must trust you—to a point. Take him with you and get what you want. Go and come directly. You have no proof of anything yet."

Cleancut drove me over to my place. I put my gun and gear and some clothes into a bag, and told the manager I was taking a vacation for a couple of weeks.

I DIDN'T EVEN try to contact Ryan. I could have knocked out Handsome easily enough, but there was nothing to be gained. In spite of what Miss Hari had said, I was perfectly sure she and her father weren't the top conspirators I was looking for. She was in the plot up to her neck, but I didn't even have proof her father was. Only her word.

There would be no point at all in blowing the whistle so early in the game. I was sure I'd been shadowed all the way by our side. They'd be checking the Hari woman by now whether or not I made a move.

In a way I liked her nerve in telling me McKenzie was the Red

and not her principals. That part at least would have been convincing, if I hadn't known better to begin with.

Back on the Beach I was given one of the four bedrooms that went with the suite. Miss Hari had the master bedroom of course. One of the small ones was used by her personal maid. The fourth was empty. Handsome wasn't living with us. He or somebody else would be someplace around to stop me if I tried to leave, I gathered. But that was all.

That night Alicia and I had a brandy together and watched television. A real thrilling evening. After the Late Show we went to bed—separately. She hadn't seemed to want to talk, so I didn't try. The house phone had been taken out of my room. Nice thoughtful touch.

If I'd really been the International Agent type I suppose I'd have had seventeen electronic atomic mystery gadgets hidden in my underwear or under my toe-nails. One of them would have been able to send out code messages over the house wire.

I'm also sure Miss Hari and company would have been ready with some other gadget to pick up the messages. I was almost sorry to disappoint them, but I don't believe in gadgets. I figure my business is like any other. The simplest way to do the job is always the best.

So I don't carry electronic miracle tools. I'd rather depend on cer-

tainties like the law that says the other fellow will always act according to his nature. If I can study him till I know what that nature is; then I can always be one step ahead of his next move. That would be the winning edge for me as it always had been.

Alicia Hari gave me the chance to study her for the two days we spent together in that luxury hotel suite. Partly it was because she wanted to study me—partly to keep me under observation just in case I wasn't what I was supposed to be. Another reason was just that I was a man. No beautiful and intelligent woman I've ever known can resist trying to make a special impression on a man—any man. It's the nature of the beast.

In any case, it played right into my hands. I had my chance. The odd thing—give her credit—was that I learned as little as I did.

The first morning I had room service send a big breakfast up to my room. Alicia didn't show till nearly noon. Then she was wearing a silk sari in an oriental swirl of blue, green and gold. Her dark hair made a shining casque on the small, gracefully held head. Makeup was minimal but most effective. Her dark eyes were so alive they were almost independent of the rest of her.

I asked her about her island, needing to know all I could learn for future emergency use. She told me a lot, and very little. Not a word

about politics. No identifiable names or character sketches in politics or power structure. I realized shortly that here I'd have to rely on what briefing my own side had already been able to give me.

She made it indefinably clear I was not supposed to bother my head about such things. They were not my affair. Once on the island I would be a weapon in exactly the same sense as a loaded gun or an activated time bomb. I was a weapon and nothing more. A gun does not need to know why it is fired or who its bullet is going to kill.

It went against the grain, but I made myself realize this was part of the price I paid for taking on the role of hired assassin. This time I was someone else's instrument of policy. My being alive didn't make me any more human to my employers than any other weapon in their arsenal. It was a new feeling for Johnny Hawk, and I didn't like it. I made myself accept the role only because I had no choice.

Nevertheless it tempted me to give myself a personal meaning in Alicia's eyes. No attractive woman can ever be completely impersonal in the company of a strange man. I found myself beginning to exploit that age-old truth. In spite of herself she answered me on this ground.

Surely she loved her native land. Whatever else she might be, she was a patriot in that sense.

"Everything is there," she said

to me. "Beauty and utility. Wealth and poverty. Mountain and jungle and beach and strange and wonderful things. This is an island carved from a continent and keeping the continental fauna and flora. It is an insular environment; yet with all things on the grand scale."

On another occasion: "We have lakes of pitch, streams of tar, oysters growing on trees, an animal resembling a fish that produces its young alive, crabs that climb and feed in fruit trees, another fish that entertains us with a concert, and lastly, one kind that is clad in a complete suit of armor."

She spoke of the capital, bowered in tropical bloom, where the broad avenues are called "squares"; with its Anglican Gothic cathedral and a collonaded and galleried Italian style police barracks.

I did get her to describe the government palace where the job I was hired for would be done. It was a rambling, two-story building of native stone with accretions and additions stuck on through the years. I asked for a floor plan, but she put me off.

"Later, Johnny." We'd reached the first-name stage. "Later you'll get a detailed map of your escape route. I've said we'd take good care of you."

She held out her tall glass to be refilled from a pitcher of a cold, sweet, rum-and-fruit mixture her maid had put together. She drank steadily through the whole two



days; yet somehow contrived not to look or talk drunk. The blood pulsed warmly under her old-ivory skin and the dark eyes were languorous. That was all.

I'm not a drinker myself, at least not when I'm working. I had a hard time appearing to keep up with her and at the same time keeping my own brain clear.

This was, I soon knew, a passionate woman despite all appearances. Behind the precise, somewhat old-fashioned English was a throat that could moan with love. Under the immaculate surface of sophisticated beauty burned volcanic fires. It was nothing that she said or did those two days. We never touched each other. I just knew.

At breakfast on the third day she got a long distance phone call. This

was what we'd been waiting for. Within the hour we were checked out and on the way to the airport.

When we checked our luggage I saw Captain Ryan buying a magazine at the newsstand across the esplanade. He never looked my way. It reminded me of what I was there for.

The airliner took us to Maracaibo in Venezuela. There we drove straight to the docks to board a shining diesel yacht moored in the old Spanish harbor.

"Every spy story has to have a yacht," I told myself. "I think that 007 lad would approve of this one." If he didn't, he should have. It was a floating palace, built originally for a top man in the old Nazi machine. The crew fell over their own feet being obsequious to Alicia. We got underway almost immediately.

Late on the third night following we slipped into the harbor of Capital City and anchored as one of a pride of other yachts. It had been a pleasant trip. Among her own people Alicia had felt safe enough to relax and become, for a space, completely feminine. She was immensely stimulating. We openly courted each other to the scarcely veiled disapproval of the yacht's captain.

By the second night his eyes looked murder when he saw me come on deck.

"If I have to get away on this yacht," I thought. "The sharks will dine on Johnny Hawk the first night out."

WHEN THE ANCHOR was down and the big boat swinging to the slow, pre-dawn tide the gangway was lowered and a fast black motor boat came almost noiselessly out of the night. In preparation for landing I had my bag packed and the big Colt's holstered at my belt. Alicia Hari had donned slacks and a dark sweater and left her luggage for the maid to bring ashore later on.

There were two men in the boat—dark, competent types who might have been fishermen or navy ratings. There was no way I could tell. The boat's motors were powerful and fine-tuned till they purred like cats. They took us away swiftly.

Within the minute we all knew we were being followed. A dark blur astern, that could have been the twin of our boat, came swiftly up and fastened to our wake. Whoever it was made no attempt to close, but they had to stay near enough to see us. That meant we could see them too.

Alicia put her mouth to my ear. "This is not good, Johnny. It means we were expected. They mustn't know where we take you."

"I'll start earning my pay," I told her. To the men: "Give me your knives."

I was sure they knew English, but they just looked at me blankly till Alicia backed me up.

"Give them," she said.

I took the two sharp, heavy sail-

or's belt-knives and put them in my own belt.

"I'll take the wheel too."

The steersman looked as if he wanted to protest, but at Alicia's nod he stepped aside. The controls were familiar, so that I had the feel of the powerful boat almost at once.

First I slowed down a bit as if unaware I was followed and wanting to take things easy and not attract attention. The following craft slowed to hold his place.

About a quarter mile ahead was the black loom of a long, heavy laden oil tanker with full bunkers waiting for light to leave the harbor. I steered to cross her bows and then turn at a sharp angle and run towards her stern. I went slowly enough so that the other boat came round after me while we were still in sight. I let him see me make a slow U-turn around the tanker's stern.

As soon as the dark bulk hid me I U-turned again and throttled down to hang in ambush right under the stern.

My tail wasn't stupid. Instead of turning right on my wake he went wide past the stern, meaning to gain open water and be able to see me again before he closed in or followed. The maneuver would have spoiled any ordinary ambush. If I'd just slowed down and waited for him, he'd have had the advantage.

The fact I'd already turned and started moving towards him gave

me the edge in spite of his caution. I pulled the throttle open, poured on speed, and came up behind him like he was standing waiting for a street car.

There was only one man in the cockpit. He saw me come and grabbed for the gun in his belt, but it was much too late. As our boat came up abreast of his I threw a knife at barely six-foot distance. The heavy blade went in between his shoulder blades.

He stiffened and crumpled as the blade broke his spine. The boat shot off at a tangent. I stepped back and gave one man the wheel. The other took back his knife.

"Just like that," Alicia said. Her face was close to mine. I could see her eyes shine in the starlight reflected off the water. The lips were moist and parted as if she'd just been kissed. "Just like that. So simple."

For answer I did kiss her. There was passion in her response before she thought to pull away. "Not now, Johnny."

Nobody said anything more until we docked at a tumble-down wharf in an almost deserted section of the old harbor. Alicia and I scrambled ashore, and the boat went away instantly into the dark. I had only a vague idea where we were.

Alicia Hari knew exactly.

"Thanks to you they don't know where we are," she said. "We'd better move fast before they put a watch on the whole waterfront."

She took my hand and we melted into a maze of odorous, offal-floored alleys that gradually became streets as the ground rose away from the water.

A mile and a half hour of this and we reached a big old frame house set behind high walls and iron gates in the midst of a tangle of tropical foliage. Even by day it would be almost invisible from the street. There was a man at the gate to let us in and fasten a padlock and chain behind us.

From outside the house was dark, but there were old-fashioned kerosene lamps burning inside and another guard to pass us in. Like the other men I'd seen he was dark and capable looking. This one had a shotgun.

Three other men, evidently from a good deal higher class, were grouped around a big, native mahogany table in the main downstairs room of the house. They greeted Alicia in a language I didn't know, probably Hindu, and appraised me with the look usually reserved for a race-horse or a new hunting dog.

I looked them over too. They were three of a kind—medium height, medium dark, black-eyed and dark suited; soft-handed and manicured. No one of them had the intangible air of command that would have marked the real leader I was after. These were lieutenants, no more. Their names weren't mentioned.

To my surprise they had a portable fingerprinting outfit, and used it on my right hand. The result was compared with a photo one of them had.

"From one of the brandy glasses you used in a Miami restaurant, Johnny," Alicia explained. "Just to be sure I brought the right you."

"There's only one me," I said.

The three stooges might never have heard, for all their expressions showed.

"If it's not too much to ask," I said, "who was it chased us on the water?" That did startle them a bit, which was what I wanted.

Alicia gave them the story. Then, to me: "Probably the police. And they weren't chasing you. It was me they were shadowing."

"Why not me?"

She laughed. "You've been here for two days, Johnny. At least someone of our people made up to resemble you superficially came off a cruise boat with a proper passport in your name and took a hotel room. That was in case anyone was alerted to arrest Johnny Hawk. Nobody was. By now he's vanished."

"Clever," I said. "Very clever. Now tell me the rest."

"The man is insolent," one of the lieutenants observed.

"Of course he is," Alicia said.

"Of course," I told them. "If I wasn't, I wouldn't be the man for you. I wouldn't take the risk of a job like this." That shut them up so Alicia could talk to me.



"Tonight you and I stay here," she said. "The false Johnny is supposed to be out with some woman, so he won't be expected at his hotel. We'll be as safe here as anywhere. It's the first time we've used this house. In the morning you do the job."

"Details?" I said. "How do I get to him?"

"An appointment has been made through regular official channels for you to see him at Government House. My father has recommended you as an expert to train the constabulary in guerilla and personal combat tactics, advanced style. Your reputation makes it logical, and this way you can go in under your own name. We give you a passport and official correspondence to prove identity. Once inside you do the job."

"How do I take my gun in? Won't anybody be searched before an interview?"

"You forget you have friends in the government, Johnny." She indicated one of the three men. "Leo is a Constabulary officer. He will vouch for you at the gate."

"Good enough," I said. "Now who else will be present at the killing? What about guards?"

"There is one bodyguard always present. He's good with a gun, but you're supposed to be better. McKenzie also has a gun. My father will be there too, but he won't be armed or try to interfere with you if he was. Leo will be in the ante-room to neutralize the sentry who usually stands there."

"Sure you aren't afraid, Yankee?" Leo asked. I didn't like the way he used the word.

I said in Spanish, "I do not fear a regiment of you." He understood all right.

Alicia ignored the exchange.

"I will give you a plan of the palace," she said, "with your escape route clearly marked, and will discuss it with you. Outside I will meet you myself and take you to a fast boat in which you can reach the mainland near Guiria. I will not fail you, Johnny."

"I know that," I said. She gave me a dazzling smile.

After a while two of the men left the house. Leo would sleep on a cot to spell the guard later on. Alicia lit a candle—there were electric fixtures, but no power—and took me upstairs. Only one room was furnished—with a big double bed.

"I want to watch you till morning," she said, very low in her throat. "We cannot risk losing you."

Who am I to turn down a chance like that?

IN THE MORNING the sun was well up before I awoke. Alicia was already up and gone downstairs. Somewhere I could smell eggs frying in butter.

There was a basin of fresh water and towels. I washed and shaved and put on a medium-light grey flannel suit with a jacket cut loose enough to hide my gun. I left the brown shoes I'd worn the night before, and put on a pair of blue canvas yachting shoes. The corded soles would give me firm footing on any surface, if I had to run.

I checked my gear as carefully as a pilot does his instruments before take-off. It's a habit I formed long ago. The Case knife with the two three-inch blades went into my right hand pants pocket. The set of passkeys and the cellophane lock-pick in the left. I snapped the spring on the fountain-pen-stiletto and saw the narrow blade tongue out. Instinctively I swung out the cylinder of the big, blue .45 Colts.

In that split second I went cold as ice. I'd loaded that gun myself, with my special handloads, five minutes before we left the Miami hotel suite. The gun had been on my person or under the pillow when I slept ever since. Only last night

I'd put it on the seat of a chair next to the bed.

In spite of that somebody had removed my shells and filled all six chambers with .45 caliber blanks.

The spare shells in belt loops in back where they wouldn't show were okay. So were the others in a cardboard box in my bag. I checked each round properly as I reloaded the gun. The blanks went loose into my jacket pocket. I was doing a lot of thinking right then.

I chose a conservative, blue and grey striped four-in-hand tie and knotted it carefully. When Alicia called from downstairs I put the gun in its clip holster back of my right hip, butt forward; put on my jacket, and went right down.

She and Leo were eating a big breakfast of coffee, fruit, eggs and rolls. As I came in she flashed me a warm, intimate smile. I returned it with interest, but declined any breakfast. Why risk being drugged?

"Not eating?" she said. "It'll do you good."

"Never before a job," I said shortly. "You never saw a man gut-shot after a meal."

She shuddered. "I never have." The two of them went on eating.

My appointment was for ten o'clock, and we left about an hour ahead of time to walk to the palace. Alicia kissed me good-by. It was a real kiss, a man shaker.

The walk with Leo gave me a chance to think. Neither of us felt like talking. I had plenty of re-

evaluation to do, decisions to make, and little enough time for it.

I still didn't know the thing I'd been sent to learn, who the local head of the plot was. Now I didn't even know which side Leo and Alicia were on. She'd let me think her father was Mr. Big. In fact she'd been pretty obvious about it. In the light of the blanks-for-cartridges switch, much too obvious.

Apparently I wasn't supposed to kill the man I'd been hired to do in. Yet the government man in Miami had been sure the plot was a real one. Why else would Smith-Brown-Whatsisname be involved?

Who stood to gain by having the plot miscarry? By having me gunned down by the bodyguard? Somewhere here there was betrayal within betrayal and treachery within double-cross. I had to figure it right the first time. I was sure there'd be no second chance.

I had only one thing going my way at the moment. The one real gamble they'd actually had to take had gone for me. I was both warned and re-armed. There was no way they could know it. Almost any other man might have blown his top when he found the blanks in his gun. I hadn't.

Indeed I would never have spotted it myself except for one fact they hadn't noticed. The blanks were loaded in regular .45 Auto Rim brass. I reload mine with 300 gr. lead and mark the base of each reload with a spot of red lacquer

for easy identification in a hurry. They'd never noticed. If they had, and had marked the blanks, I'd have gone like an innocent lamb to the slaughter.

Slaughter was right. It was clear now I wasn't meant to come away from this business. That meant I could forget about the escape map I'd memorized. That route would be booby trapped for sure.

Some men might have made a break for it right then and let the wheels within wheels foul themselves up. I didn't try it, and I had my reasons. In the first place I was sure Leo and I were followed and observed. If I tried to run, they could gun me down in the street. Whether they were police or Alicia's people wouldn't matter to me.

Then I couldn't forget I had a job still to do. Instinct told me I'd never find the top man unless I went through with the deal as planned. My respect for these people was growing. They were dangerous, and they had to be stopped for my country's sake.

I wished our people hadn't had to send me, that I'd never been picked by the conspirators. But, since I had been, I'd do the job if it was humanly possible.

Leo showed his papers to a smartly uniformed sentry at the palace gate, and we were passed in at once. The building sat in a regular park of ornamental tropical foliage. It was a block and a half long, built of native stone, only two

stories high. There was a Mansard type roof of slate to give the protection from heat that only air space can supply in that climate.

I noticed part of the roof-rise had been cut away at intervals to mount big electric blower fans to change the air. There were ornamental iron grilles over the ground floor windows, but not those on the second floor.

Since this was to be a personal interview, McKenzie would see me in his private office on the second floor. There was a single sentry at the head of the marble staircase. We went down a long hall and turned sharp right into another hall leading down a wing to the back of the main building.

The office was right at the end of the hall, and there was another sentry and a waiting bench.

Leo showed his papers again, and the sentry opened the door and spoke to someone inside. Leo sat down on the bench. I went in alone.

The leonine head and greying mane of hair and beard behind the big rosewood desk were unmistakably McKenzie. At the end of the desk to his left was a dark, fine looking man in a military tunic who had to be Alicia's father, Colonel Hari. The bodyguard stood right behind McKenzie. He was a big black with shoulders that bulged his frock coat, and a gun under his left armpit. He looked tough and fast.

I walked into the room, and be-

tween step and step I knew what had to be done.

"Mr. Hawk?" McKenzie asked in his crisp Oxford English.

"Your Excellency," I said.

I was trying to watch both men at the desk without seeming to watch either. I was almost, but not quite, sure which one would give the signal for me to be gunned down. McKenzie settled it for me.

"Colonel Hari," he said, "this is the man I was speaking to you about the other day." The colonel was busy lighting a long Havana cigar, and made only a polite murmur in reply.

The pieces of the puzzle were all in place now. "Your Excellency," I said again.

I took one of the blank cartridges out of my pocket and tossed it onto the desk pad in front of him. Colonel Hari paid no attention except to look mildly surprised.

The Premier *controlled* himself. The black eyes that showed his mother's blood went blank as a couple of marbles. He knew what it was all right. Then he had to have known about its being put in my gun. That meant Alicia had been working for him.

"Mr. Hawk," he tried, "this changes everything."

"Indeed it does," I said.

The tension was like static electricity in the small room. Only the colonel was unaffected.

"We'd better talk," McKenzie said.



"No," I told him. "No talk. Keep your hand out of the desk drawer, McKenzie."

I was sure he had a gun there. Colonel Hari looked up in surprise at my words.

The big bodyguard at my left was fast—almost fast enough. If he hadn't still thought I was unarmed, he might just possibly have had me.

Almost isn't good enough. My right hand went under the jacket skirt and brought the big gun out. Waist high, I caught my right wrist with my left hand as I turned. The gun was level, pointed right in front so that I aimed by swinging on my toes. The heavy slug paralyzed the guard and knocked him off his feet. He died.

McKenzie was clawing the gun in his desk drawer. He fumbled it and caught the sight on the desk top. His eyes almost popped out of his head. I pivoted to the right,

reached out till the gun muzzle was inches from his face, and blew his brains out. Blood and brains splashed Hari's tunic as he tried to rise.

I went all the way round to my right, holding the gun in front of me with the two-hand grip again, until I faced the door.

Leo came in with his gun out as I'd expected. His trouble was it was me he had expected to see dead. I was in a half crouch, and I don't think he ever really saw me. My shot took him in the heart and knocked him over backwards. His legs were still trying to run as he fell.

The sentry behind him had his rifle still at "port". He didn't even try to fire. It was probably the first time he'd seen a man killed, and he was only a recruit. He fainted. I didn't blame him.

I let my own momentum carry me all the way round to the right till I faced the desk again. Colonel Hari was grabbing for the gun the premier had dropped on the floor. I leaned over the desk and hit him with the barrel of my .45. Then I cut lamp and phone cords and tied him and the sentry. I gagged them each with their own socks.

THE OFFICE WAS air conditioned and isolated at the end of a long corridor lined with empty conference and lounge rooms. If anyone in the palace had heard the only shot fired while the door was open, he hadn't identified it as a shot. Maybe people had even been or-

dered out of this particular wing in advance so there'd be no witnesses to the scheduled killing.

In any case, there was no immediate alarm sounded. Less than ten minutes had passed since I entered the room.

The escape plan Alicia had given me called for me to go out one of the rear office windows, lower myself to the metal storm awning over the ground-floor window below, and from that to the ground where I could run into the shrubbery. There was a small postern gate way over at the rear of the grounds which would be unlocked, and a guide waiting for me there.

I hadn't the slightest notion of trying that route. Either there'd be no gate, or it would be locked. The "guide" would turn out to be three men with shotguns to finish me off, if I managed to get that far, which wasn't probable.

They must have been idiots, or thought I was one. The second I'd fired my gun and spotted the blanks I'd have known enough not to trust anything else they'd said. But I guess I can't really blame them. They were conspirators, and thought in circles by nature.

I'm a simple man and I think simply. I could trust them to watch the back door—so I went out the front. Nobody in the corridors even noticed me. The guard had seen me go in. It didn't surprise him to see me go out. I gave him a mock sa-

lute, and he smiled at me. I'm Johnny Hawk.

As it turned out I was two blocks away from the square before the alarm bells began to clang back at the palace. Nobody on the streets knew what was wrong yet, let alone who to look for. So I just kept walking peacefully on my way.

The nearest contact point Mr. Whiskers had given me in Miami was a run-down restaurant on the edge of the central business district. I gave the proprietor the password and he took me upstairs to his private quarters. When I'd told him as much as I thought it was good for him to know, we agreed that I'd better get out of the city fast.

He wanted to guide me through back alleys to that nebulous rim where town and country merge. I wouldn't have it. "It's just what your police will expect. There aren't enough of them to really cordon off the city, so they'll have flying patrols all through the outer slum districts. Even if they missed us, some sharp-eyed old woman or kid would spot me for sure and bring them down on us long before we got out of town."

He finally loaned me an old and dirty seersucker suit and a battered old '47 Chevy truck that would barely turn-over its motor. I put his sixteen year-old-daughter on the front seat beside me and a gaggle of assorted neighborhood kids from two to ten or so in the truck body. Officially we were making a trip to

the country to buy vegetables for the restaurant. The kids had a wonderful time.

I drove right out the only good highway. There was a police check post at the edge of town, but they were looking for an American. The sergeant just waved us through.

A couple of miles out of town a big open convertible full of men barreled by us in a rush.

One of the men I'd seen with Leo was driving. So they were after me too.

I was sure everybody and his brother would have the old American Air Force Base staked out, waiting for me to show. So I had young Maria point out a dirt track that twisted through brush and mangroves to an abandoned fishing shack on the beach. I gave her some money to buy vegetables and a lot more to buy a dress for herself and ice cream for the kids. She was delighted.

As soon as I left the main road I activated the electronic button beeper I'd been given in Miami. I figured somebody had to be listening for sure by now. I was right. I spent the afternoon battling bugs and sweating in the mangrove shade.

Right after full dark an unmarked whirly-bird, without running lights, dropped down and sat itself on the beach—quite properly mistrusting the rotted dock. I waded out through stinking, knee deep mud and climbed aboard.

The agent I'd met in Miami was sitting beside the pilot.

"You fouled it up for sure," he said as we lifted off.

"Don't jump to conclusions," I said.

"Jump—shmump! You were sent in there to keep McKenzie alive. Now we hear you killed him yourself. Are you crazy?"

"I'm alive, buster," I said. "Is that answer enough?"

"Not for me it isn't. And not for my bosses. Americans are about as popular on that island right now as a dead cat under the floor. In case you forgot, that wasn't the original idea."

The copter was gaining altitude and heading out to sea.

"Anybody got a drink?" I asked.

The agent passed me an opened pint of sour-mash Bourbon.

"Okay," he said, "Everybody tells me you're not stupid. What is it I don't know?"

"I ought to make you beg," I said, "but I'm too glad to see you to play games."

I began to fill him in step by step. He wasn't stupid either. By the time I got to the interview with McKenzie he had caught up with my thinking.

"So McKenzie himself was the man we wanted."

"Right. He had to be. They'd told me Hari had set up the appointment. He hadn't. McKenzie had. So why did he want to bring in his own killer? Because he knew

my gun would be fixed. I was supposed to try for him and be killed right there. I think Colonel Hari was marked for death too. Live ammo would be put in my gun, and he'd be shot with that."

I took another drink. "The public would only know that an American agent, a known killer, had tried for McKenzie and knocked over Hari. McKenzie could break relations with us with popular backing and bring in his little yellow pals from back of the bamboo curtain. He could make himself dictator.

"It fits so far," the agent said.

"Of course it does. The only trouble was they picked the wrong pigeon. I checked my gun. They didn't know that or know about my handloads. They had to gamble and lost."

"Why couldn't they have just hired someone to fake a try at assassination?"

"It wouldn't have worked," I said. "A pro would have known they'd have to kill him to cover up. A stooge would have bungled things so the truth would come out. Using me was perfect, as long as nothing was wrong with the plot. I'm the genuine article. That must be why their foreign friends recommended me in the first place."

"All right," he said, "but now what about Colonel Hari? As interim head of state he could still play ball with the reds. Remember, he saw you kill his chief."

"Two things will stop him. He's

no red and he's not stupid. When he puts two and two together, does a bit of investigating, and checks the information our ambassador can give him, he'll know the truth. That's not what bothers me now."

"I'd like to know what does."

"Alicia. How in the name of all that's holy, could the daughter of a real gentleman like Hari get into a plot where he would be killed? Of course maybe she didn't know—but that girl was a real smart cookie, if ever I saw one."

Mr. Whiskers looked at me for a minute before he began to laugh. It started as a chuckle and went up to a spasm. Laughing like that, he became completely human for the first time since I'd met him.

"I don't get it," I said.

He finally got control of himself. "For the first time I like you, Hawk. I'd begun to think you were as infallible as you seem to think you are."

He went off in another roar of laughter. I waited.

"I thought you knew, of course," he said at last. "Colonel Hari has a daughter all right. Her mother was English. Her name is Anne Louise and she's sixteen years old and in school in Switzerland. You've been had, Johnny Hawk. You've been had for good."

He was right, but I was too glad to be alive to really get angry. I toasted the absent Alicia in Bourbon. Then I was able to laugh too.

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A previously published story is not necessarily permanently preserved, available to everyone. Too often, in fact, it is just the opposite. So transitory is magazine publication alone—usually thirty days on sale—that far too many outstanding tales are overlooked and forgotten before they have their deserved chance to become famous. We are especially privileged this issue to feature a tale by the late, great Seabury Quinn, Master of the Macabre, creator of Jules La Grande, the astro detective among hundreds of other never-to-be-forgotten heroes. This, one of his most powerful tales, is deservedly famous. From time to time, therefore, in this magazine, you will see the Department of Lost Stories. When you do, read with care and discrimination. You will be reading a story which, whatever its field, whoever its author, has been revered and remembered as too good to be forgotten. "Three In Chains" is one of these. You'll remember it.

THE EDITORS

THREE IN CHAINS

by SEABURY QUINN

THE MURMUR OF voices sounded from the drawing room as I let myself in wearily after a hard afternoon at the hospital. An intern might appreciate two appendectomies and an accouchement within the space of four hours, but an intern would need the practice and be thirty years my junior.

I was dog-tired and in no mood

to entertain visitors. As silently as I could I crept down the hall, but:

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," Jules de Grandin hailed as I passed the partly opened door on tiptoe, "*a moi, s'il vous plait*. This is of interest, this."

Putting the best face I could upon the matter I joined him.

"May I present Monsieur and



Madame Jaquay?" he asked, then with a bow to the callers, "*Monsieur, Madame, Dr. Trowbridge.*"

The young man who stepped forward with extended hand had fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, a broad, low forehead and deep greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath straight brows. The woman seated on the sofa was in every way his feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap her short-cropped black hair, combed straight back from her forehead and waved in little ripples, lay against her small well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to seem almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry. The dead-white pallor of her skin was enhanced by her lack of rouge and the brilliant lipstick on her mouth, while the greenness of her hazel eyes was rendered more noticeable by skillfully applied eye shadow.

I shook hands with the young man and bowed to the girl—she was little more—then looked at them again in wonder. "Mr. and Mrs. Jaquay?" I asked. "You look more like—"

"Of course, we do," the girl cut in. "We're twins."

"Twins—"

"Practically, sir. Our mothers were first cousins, and our fathers were first cousins, too, though not related to our mothers, except by marriage. We were born in the same hospital within less than half an hour of each other, and grew up in

adjoining houses. We went to school, high school and college together, and were married the day after graduation."

"Is it not entirely charming?" Jules de Grandin demanded.

I was becoming somewhat nettled. Tired as I was I had no wish to interview two-headed calves, Siamese twins, cousins married to each other and like as grains of sand on the seashore or other natural phenomena.

"Why, yes, of course," I agreed, "but—"

"But there is more—*parbleu*, much more!" the little Frenchman assured me. To the young man he ordered: "Tell him what you have told me, *mon jeune. Mordieu*, but you shall see his eyes pop like those of an astonished toad-frog!"

I dropped into a chair and tried my best to assume a look of polite interest as young Jaquay ran his hand over his sleek hair, cast a look of appeal at de Grandin and began hesitantly.

"Georgine and I came here three months ago. Our uncle, Yancy Molloy, made us sole beneficiaries of his will and Tofte House—perhaps you know the place?—was part of our inheritance. We've been living there a little over two months. We've become very much attached to it; we'd hate to have to leave."

"Then why not stay?" I answered somewhat ungraciously. "If the house is yours and you like it—"

"Because it's haunted, sir."

"What!" I exclaimed.

He colored slightly, but went on: "It's haunted. We didn't notice anything out of the ordinary for the first few days we lived there, then gradually both Georgine and I began to—well, sir, to feel alien presences there. We'd be reading in the library or sitting at table, or just going about our affairs in the house when suddenly we'd have that strange, uncanny feeling you have when someone stares fixedly at the back of your neck.

"When we'd turn suddenly, as we always did at first, there'd be no one there, of course, but that odd, eerie sensation of being constantly and covetly watched persisted. Instead of wearing off it grew stronger and stronger till we could hardly bear it."

"U'm?" I commented, taking quick stock of our callers, noting their small stature, their delicacy of form and feature . . . their double cousinship amounted almost to inbreeding, fertile ground for neuroses to sprout in. "I know that feeling of malaise you refer to, and the fact that you both experienced it seems diagnostic. You young folks of today burn the candle at both ends. These visual, sensory and circulatory symptoms aren't at all unusual. You'll have to take it easier, get much more rest and a lot more sleep. If you can't sleep I'll give you some trional—"

"But certainly," de Grandin cut in. "And the trional will surely stop

the sound of clanking chains and dismal, hollow groans."

"What," I turned on him, "are you trying to tell me?"

"Monsieur Jaquay was endeavoring to do so when you interrupted. Say on, *Monsieur*," he ordered our guest.

"We were getting pretty much on edge from this feeling of being watched so constantly," young Jaquay continued, "but it wasn't till last week we heard anything. We've made some pleasant friends in Harrisonville, sir, and been going out quite a bit. Last Saturday we'd been to New York on a party with Steve and Mollie Tenbroeck and Tom and Jennie Chaplin—dinner at the Wedgewood Room, to Broadway to see 'Up in Central Park,' then to Copacabana for supper and dancing. It must have been a little after three when we got home.

"Georgine had gone to bed, and I was in the bathroom when I heard her scream. I ran into the bedroom with the dentrifice suds still on my lips, and there she was, huddled in the bed with the covers drawn up to her chin, pushing against the headboard as if she were trying to force herself through it. 'Something touched me!' she chattered. 'It was like an ice-cold hand!'

"We'd had several rounds of cocktails at both dinner and supper, and Burgundy with dinner and champagne at supper, but both of us were cold sober—well, not more than pleasantly exhilarated—when

we got home. 'You're nuts,' I told Georgine.

"And just as I spoke something went wrong with the lights. The lamps began to grow dim slowly, as if a rheostat were being turned off. It was possibly a half-minute before the room was dark, but when the darkness came it was terrific. It pressed down on us like a great blanket, then it seemed to smother us completely—more completely than a thousand black cloths. You know that wild, unreasoning feeling of panic you have when you choke at table? This was like it.

I tried to call to Georgine. The best that I could do was utter a choked, strangling gasp. I tried to go to her; it was like trying to wade waist-deep through a strong tide. The blackness in that room seemed liquefied, almost solidified.

"Then we heard it. At first it was no more than a whisper, like the sighing of a storm heard miles away, but getting louder, stronger, every second, like a storm that rushes toward you. Then the sigh changed to a moan and the moan became a howl, and the howl rose to a screech, and then rose to a piercing shriek that stabbed our eardrums like a needle.

It rose and rose, spiraling upward till it seemed no human throat could stand the strain of it. Then it stopped suddenly with a deep, guttural gurgle, as if all that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked down into a drainpipe.

"I could feel the perspiration trickling down my forehead and into my eyes, but the sweat seemed turned to ice as the silence was smashed by the clanking of a chain. At first it was no more than a light clinking sound, as if some tethered beast stirred in the darkness. But like the shriek it increased in volume till it seemed some chained monster were straining at his iron leash, striving with a strength past anything that man or beast knows to break loose from its fetters."

Jaquay halted in his narrative to draw a handkerchief from his breast pocket and pass it over his brow.

"And then, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin prompted.

"Then the lights flashed on, not slowly, as they had gone off, but with a sudden blaze of blinding brightness, and there we were in our bedroom and everything was just the same. Georgine was cowering against the headboard of the bedstead, and I was standing at the bathroom door, blinking like a fool in the sharp, dazzling light, with the dentifrice suds still on my lips and running down my chin to dribble on the floor."

"And there have been more—manifestations?"

Georgine Jacquay answered in her charmingly modulated contralto. "Not so—so violent, sir. George and I were pretty badly shaken by what happened Saturday night, or more precisely Sunday morning, but we were both very tired and

dropped off to sleep before we realized it. Next day was bright and sunny and we'd almost succeeded in convincing ourselves the experience of the night before was nothing but a sort of double nightmare when that sensation of being watched became stronger than ever. Only now it seemed somehow different."

"Hein?"

"Yes, sir. As if whoever—or whatever—watched us were gloating. Our uneasiness increased as the afternoon wore on; by bedtime we were in a pretty sorry state, but—"

"Ah, but you had the hardihood, the courage, *n'est-ce-pas, Madame?* You did not let it drive you from your home?"

"We did not," George Jaquay's small mouth snapped shut like a miniature steel trap on the denial. "We hadn't any idea what it was that wanted to get rid of us, but we determined to face up to it."

"*Bravissimo!* And then?"

"I don't know how long we'd been sleeping. Perhaps an hour; perhaps only a few minutes, but suddenly I wakened and sat bolt-upright, completely conscious. I had a feeling of sharp apprehension, as if an invisible alarm-bell were sounding a warning in my brain. There was no moon, but a little light came through the bedroom windows, enough for me to distinguish the furniture. Everything seemed as usual; then all at once I noticed the door. It showed against



the further wall in a dark oblong. Dark. Dark like a hole. Somehow the comparison made me breathe faster. I could feel the pulses racing in my wrists and throat.

"The door had been shut—and locked—when we went to bed. Now it swung open, and I had a feeling unseen eyes were staring at me from the hallway while mine sought helplessly to pierce the darkness. Then I heard it. Not loud this time, but a sort of whimpering little moan, such as a sick child might give, and then the feeble clanking of a chain, as if whatever were bound by it moved a little, but not much. Then, very softly, came a woman's voice."

"A woman's, *Madame?*"

"Yes, sir. I could not possibly have been mistaken. It was low, not a whisper, but very weak and—hopeless."

"Yes, *Madame?*" And what did this so small voice say, if you please?"

"My poor darling!"

"*Sang du diable!* It said that?"

"Yes, sir. Just that. No more."

"And were there further voices?"

"No, sir. There were a few weak, feeble moans, repeated at longer

and longer intervals, and every once in a while the chain would rattle, but there were no more words."

Jules de Grandin turned to young Jaquay.

"And did you hear this so strange voice also, *Monsieur*?"

"No, sir. I slept through it all, but later in the night, perhaps, just before morning, I awakened with a feeling someone stood beside the bed and watched me, and then I heard the scraping of a chain—not across our floor, but over something hard and gritty, like stone or perhaps concrete, and three people moaning softly."

"Three? *Grand Dieu des cochons*, the man says three! How could you tell, *Monsieur*?"

"Their voices were distinct and different. One was a man's, a light baritone, well-pitched, but very weak. The other two were women's, one soft and husky, like stroked velvet, a Negro woman's, I'm sure, and the other was lighter in tone, musical, but very feeble."

"They did not speak?"

"Not in words, sir, but from their tones I knew all three were very weak and exhausted, so far gone that it seemed nothing mattered to them."

"U'm?" de Grandin took his little pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "And what did you do next, *Monsieur*?"

Jaquay looked embarrassed. "We sent for Dr. Van Artsdalen, sir."

"Ah? And who is he?"

"He's pastor of the Union Church at Harbordale, sir. We told him everything that had happened, and he readily agreed to exorcise the house."

"*Mordieu*, did you, indeed?" de Grandin twisted the waxed ends of his small blond mustache until they were as sharp as twin needles. "And did he succeed in his mission?"

"I'm afraid he didn't, sir. He read a portion of the Scriptures from St. Luke, where it says that power was given the Disciples to cast out devils, and offered up a prayer, but—we haven't had a moment's peace since, sir."

The little Frenchman nodded. "One understands all too well, *Monsieur*. The occultism, he is neither good nor safe for amateurs to dabble in. This Doctor—the gentleman with the so funny name—may be an excellent preacher, but I fear he was out of his element when he undertook to rid your premises of unwelcome tenants. Who, by example, told him they were devils he came out to drive away?"

"Why—er—" Jaquay's face reddened—"I don't think anybody did, sir. We told him only what we had experienced, and he assured us that evil is always subject to good, and could not stand against the power of—"

"One understands completely," de Grandin cut in sharply. "The reverend gentleman is also doubtless one of those who believe savage animals cannot stand the gaze of

the human eye, that sharks must turn upon their back to bite, and that you are immune from lightning-stroke if you have rubber heels upon your shoes. In fine, one gathers he is one of those who is not ignorant because of what he does not know, but because of the things he knows which are not true. What has occurred since his visit?"

"All day we feel those unseen eyes fairly boring into us; at night the sighs and groans and chain-blankings begin almost as soon as darkness comes. Frankly, sir, we're afraid to stay in the place after sunset."

The Frenchman nodded approval. "I think that you are wise to absent yourselves, *Monsieur*. For you to stay in that house after dark would not be courageous, it would be the valor of ignorance, and that, *parbleu*, is not so good. No, not at all.

"Attend me, if you please: I have made a study of such matters. To cast out devils, may be an art of Christian faith which anyone possessing virtue may perform. Me, I do not know. But I do know from long experience that what will be effective in one case will wholly fail in another. Do you know surely what it is that haunts this house from which you have so wisely fled? Did the good *pasteur* know? Do I know? *Non, pardieu*, we grope in ignorance, all of us! We know not what it is we have to contend with.

"There are, by example, certain

things called elementals. These never were in human form; they have existed from the beginning, and, I assure you, they are very naughty. They are definitely unfriendly to humankind; they are mischievous, they are wicked. They should be given as wide a berth as possible. It is safer to walk unarmed through a jungle infested with blood-hungry tigers than to frequent spots where they are known to be.

"Then there are those things we call ghosts. They cannot be defined with nicety, but as a class they are the immortal, or at least the surviving spiritual part of that which was once man or woman. These may be either good, indifferent or bad. The bad, of course, far outnumber the good, for the great bulk of humanity that has died has not been good. *Alors*, it behooves us to step carefully when we have dealings with them. You comprehend?"

"*Bien*. It may well be the good *pasteur* used the wrong technique when he assumed to rid you of your so unwelcome cotenants. He did not surely know his adversary; it is entirely possible that he succeeded only in annoying him as one might irritate but not cripple a lion by shooting him with a light rifle. *Mais oui*, it may be so. Let us now proceed with system. Let us make a reconnaissance, spy out the land, acquaint ourselves with that with which we must match forces. When this is done we shall proceed to business, not before."

JULES DE GRANDIN asked at breakfast next morning, "Tell me, Friend Trowbridge, what do you know of this house from which Monsieur and Madame Jaquay have been driven?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," I answered. "I know it's more than a hundred years old and was built by Jacob Tofte, whose family settled in New Jersey shortly after the Dutch wrested it from the Swedes in 1655."

"Um? It is the original structure?"

"As far as I know. They built it for permanence, those old Dutchmen. I've never been inside it, but I'm told its stone walls are two feet thick."

"You do not know the year in which it was erected?"

"About 1800, I believe. It must have been before 1804, for there were originally slave quarters on the back lot, and slavery was abolished in New Jersey in that year."

"*Morbleu, pas possible?*"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing of the consequence, my friend. I did but entertain an idle thought. Those ghostly sighs and groans, those ghostly clankings of the chains, might not they have some connection with slavery?"

"None that I can see."

"And none, *helas*, that leaps to my eye, either," he admitted with a smile as he rose. "I did but toy with the suggestion." He turned toward the wall. "Expect me when I

return, *mon vieux*. I have much ground to cover, and may be late for dinner—may *le bon Dieu* grant otherwise."

The evening meal was long since over when he returned, but that his day's work had not been fruitless I knew by the twinkle in his little round blue eyes, and his first words confirmed my diagnosis.

"My friend, I would not go so far as to say I have found the key to this mystery, but I think that I can say under which doormat the key hides."

I motioned toward the decanter and cigars, a work of supererogation, for he was already pouring himself a generous drink of brandy.

"*Bien oui*," he nodded solemnly as he shot the soda hissing into his glass. "All morning I did search, and nowhere could I find a person who knew much about that execrable Tofte House until I reached the County Historical Society's archives. There I found more than ample reward for my labors. There were old deeds, old, yellowed newspapers: even the diaries of old inhabitants. Yes!

"This Jacob Tofte, he who built that house, must have been the devil of a fellow. In youth he followed the sea—who shall say how far he followed it, or into what dark paths it led him? Those were the days of sailing ships, my old friend. A man set forth upon a voyage new-married and easily might find himself the father of a five-year-old when he

returned. But not our friend old Jacob. Not he! He traveled many times to Europe, more than once to China and the Indies, and finally to Africa. There he found his true vocation. Yes!"

De Grandin paused, eyes gleaming, and it would have been cruel to have withheld the question he so obviously expected. "Did he become a blackbirder, a slaver?" I asked.

"*Parbleu*, my friend, you have put your finger on the pulse," he nodded. "A slave trader he became, *vraiment*, and probably a very good one, which means he must have been a very bad man, cruel and ruthless, utterly heartless. *Tiens*, the wicked old one prospered, as the wicked have a way of doing in this for from perfect world. When he was somewhere between forty-five and fifty years of age he returned to New Jersey very well supplied with money, retired from his gruesome trade and became a solid citizen of the community. Anon he built himself a house as solid as himself and married.

"Now here—" he leveled a slim forefinger at me like a pointed weapon— "occurs that which affords me the small inkling of a clue. The girl he married was his cousin, Marise Tenbrocken. She was but half his age and had been affianced to her cousin Merthou Van Brundt, a young man of her own age and he cousin, rather more distantly, of Monsieur Jacob. One cannot say



with certainty if she broke her engagement willingly or at parental insistence. One knows only that Monsieur Jacob was wealthy while young Monsieur Merthou was very poor and had his way to make in the world. Such things happened in the old days as in the present, my friend."

Jules de Grandin paused a moment, took a sip of brandy and soda, and lighted a cigar. "Of these things I am sure," he recommenced at length. "Divorce was not as common in those days as now, nor did people wash domestic soiled linen in public. We cannot surely know if this marriage of May and October was a happy union. At any rate the old *Monsieur* seems to have found domestic life a trifle dull after so many years of adventure, so in

1803 we find him fitting out a small schooner to go to New Orleans. *Madame* his wife remained at home. So did her *ci-devant fiancee*, who had found employment, if not consolation, in the offices of Peter Tandy, a ship chandler.

"Again I have but surmise to guide me. Did the almost-whitened embers of old love spring into ardent flame once more when Monsieur Van Brundt and Madame Tofte found themselves free from the surveillance of the lady's husband, or had they carried on a *liaison* beneath old Monsieur Jacob's nose? One wonders.

"*En tout cas*, Monsieur Jacob returned all unexpectedly from his projected voyage to New Orleans, dropping anchor in the Bay but three weeks after he had left. With Monsieur Tofte's arrival we find Madame Marise and her cousin, formerly her *fiancee*, and doubtless now her lover, vanishing completely. *Pouf!* Like that."

"And what became of them?" I asked as he remained silent.

"*Qui drait?* The devil knows, not I. They disappeared, they vanished, they evaporated; they were lost to view. With them perhaps went one Celeste, a Martinique mulatress Monsieur Jacob had bought—or perhaps stolen—to be Madame Marise's waiting maid.

"Her disappearance seemed to cause him more concern than that of *Madame* his wife and his young cousin Merthou, for he advertised

for her by handbill, offering a reward of fifty dollars for her return. She was, it seems, a valuable property, speaking French, Spanish and English, understanding needlework and cooking and the niceties of the toilette. One would think he would have offered more for her, but probably he was a very thrifty man. At any rate, it does not appear she was ever apprehended."

"And what became of Jacob Tofte?"

De Grandin shrugged his shoulders. "He sleeps, one hopes peacefully, in the churchyard of St. Chrysostom's. There was a family mausoleum on his land, but he died in 1835 he left directions for his burial in St. Chrysostom's, and devised five thousand dollars to the parish. *Tiens*, he was a puzzle, that one. His very tombstone presents an enigma."

"How's that?"

"I viewed it in the churchyard today. Beside his name and vital data it bears this bit of doggerel:

*'Beneath this stone lies J. Tofte,
The last of five fine brothers.
He died more happy by his lone
And sleeps more sound than others.'*

"What do you make from that, *hein?*"

"Humph. Except that it's more generous in its substitution of adjectives for adverbs than most epitaphs, I'd say it compares favorably

with the general level of graveyard poetry."

"Perhaps," he agreed doubtfully, "but me, I am puzzled. 'He died more happy,' says the epitaph. More happy than whom? And than whom does he sleep more soundly? Who are these mysterious others he refers to?"

"I can't imagine. Can you?"

"I—think—" he answered, speaking slowly, eyes narrowed, "I—think—I—can, my friend

"I have searched the title to that property, beginning with Monsieur Jacob's tenancy. It has changed hands a surprising number of times. Monsieur Molloy, from whom Monsieur and Madame Jaquay inherited, was the fiftieth owner of the house. He acquired it in 1930 at an absurdly small price, and went to much expense to modernize it, yet lived in it less than a year. There followed a succession of lessees, none of whom remained long in possession. For the past ten years the place was vacant. Does light begin to percolate?"

I shook my head and he smiled rather bleakly. "I feared as much. No matter. Tomorrow is another day, and perhaps we shall be all wiser then."

"You have no office hours today, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked me shortly after breakfast the next morning.

"No, this is my Sabbatical," I answered. "One or two routine calls, and then—"

"Then you can come to Tofte House with us," he interrupted with a smile. "I damn think we shall see some things there today."

George and Georgine Jaquay were waiting for us at the Berkeley-York where they had taken temporary residence, and once more I was struck by their amazing likeness to each other. George wore gray flannels and a black Homburg, a shirt of white broadcloth and a pearl-gray cravat; Georgine wore a small black hat, a gray flannel manishly-cut suit with a white blouse and a little mauve tie at her throat. Their faces were as similar as two coins stamped from the same die. The wonder of it was, I thought, that they required words to communicate with each other.

The gentleman with them I took to be their lawyer. He was about fifty, carefully if somberly dressed in a formally-cut dark suit with white edging marking the V of his waistcoat. His tortoise-shell glasses were attached to a black ribbon and in one gray-gloved hand he held a black derby and a black malacca cane.

"This is Monsieur Peteros, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin introduced when we had exchanged greetings with the Jaquays. "He is a very eminent medium who has kindly agreed to assist us."

Despite myself I raised my brows. The man might have been an attorney, a banker or mill-owner. Certainly he was the last one I should

have picked as a practitioner of the rather malodorous profession of spiritualistic medium. Perhaps my face showed more than I realized, for Mr. Peteros' thin lips compressed more tightly and he acknowledged the introduction with a frigid, "How d'ye do?"

But if the atmosphere were chilly Jules de Grandin seemed entirely unaware of it. "Come, *mes amis*," he bade, "we are assembled and the time for action has arrived. Let us go all soon and not delay one little minute. No, certainly not."

FRAMED BY BIRCH and oak, elm and maple, the big old house in Andover Road looked out upon a stretch of well-kept lawn. It was built of native bluestone without porches, and stood foursquare to the highway. Its walls were at least two feet thick, its windows high and narrow, its great front door a slab of massive oak. The sort of house a man who had been in the slave trade might have put up, a veritable fortress, capable of withstanding attacks with anything less than artillery.

Jaquay produced his key and fitted it into the incongruously modern lock of the old door, swung back the white-enameled panels and stood aside for us to enter. Mr. Peteros went first with me close at his elbow, and as I stepped across the sill I all but collided with him. He had come to an abrupt halt, his head thrown back, nostrils quiver-

ing like those of an apprehensive animal.

"Don't you sense it?" he asked in a voice that grated grittily in his throat.

Involuntarily I inhaled deeply.

"No," I replied shortly. The only thing I "sensed" was the Charbert perfume Georgine Jaquay used so lavishly. I had no very high opinion of mediums. If Peteros thought he could set the stage to put us in a mood for any revelations he might later make, he'd have to try something more subtle.

We stood in a wide, long hall, evidently stretching to the rear of the house, stone-floored and walled with rough-cast plaster. The ceiling was of beamed oak and its great timbers seemed to have been hand-squared. The furniture was rather sparse, being for the most part heavy maple, oak or hickory—benches, tables and a few rush-bottomed square-framed chairs, and though it had small beauty it had value, for the newest piece there must have been at least a hundred years old.

A fireplace stretched a full eight feet across the wall to the right, and on the bluestone slab that served for mantel were ranged pewter plates and tankards and a piece or two of old Dutch delft any one of which would have fetched its weight in gold from a knowing antique dealer. To our left a narrow stairway with a handrail of wrought brass and iron curved upward.

I was about to remark on the patent antiquity of the place when de Grandin's sharp command forestalled me: "It was in the bedroom you had your so strange experiences, my friends. Let us go there to see if Monsieur Peteros can pick up any influences."

Young Jaquay led the way, and we trooped up the narrow stairway single file, but halfway up I paused and grasped the balustrade. I had gone suddenly dizzy and felt chilled to the bone, yet it was not an ordinary chill. Rather, it seemed a sudden coldness started at my fingertips and shivered up into my shoulders, then, as with a cramp induced by a galvanic battery, every nerve in my body began to tingle and contract.

Just behind me, Peteros grasped my elbow, steadying me. "Swallow," he commanded in a sharp whisper. "Swallow hard and take a deep breath." As I obeyed the tingling feeling of paralysis left me and I heard him chuckle softly.

"I see you felt it, too," he murmured. "Probably you felt it worse than I did; you weren't prepared for it."

I nodded, feeling rather foolish.

Apparently the Jaquays had refurnished the bedroom, for it had none of the gloomy eighteenth century air of the rest of the house. The bedstead was a canopied four-poster, either Adam or a good reproduction, a tall chest of mahogany stood against one wall, between the

narrow, high-set windows was a draped dressing table in the long mirror of which were reflected silver toilet articles and crystal bottles. Curtains of fluted organdie, dainty and crisp, hung at the windows. The floor was covered with an Abusson carpet.

"*Bien*," De Grandin took command as we entered the chamber. "Will you sit there, *Madame*?" he indicated a chintz-covered chair for Georgine. "And you, Monsieur Jaquay, I would suggest you sit beside her. You may be under nervous strain. To have a loving hand to hold may prove of helpfulness. *Mais oui*, do not I know? I shall say yes. You, Friend Trowbridge, will sit here, if you please, and Monsieur Peteros will occupy this chair—" he indicated a large armchair with high, tufted back. "Me, I prefer to stand. 'Is all in readiness?"

"I think we'd better close the curtains," Peteros replied. "I seem to get the emanations better in the dusk."

"*Bien. Mais certainement*." The little Frenchman drew the brocade over-draperies of the windows, leaving us in semi-darkness.

Peteros leant back and took a silver pencil from his waistcoat pocket. Holding it upright before his face, he fixed his eyes upon its tip. A minute passed, two minutes; three. From the hall below came the ponderous, pompous ticking of the great clock, small noises from the highway—the rumble of great

cargo trucks, the yelp of motor horns—came to us through the closed and curtained windows.

Peteros continued staring fixedly at the pencil point, and in the semi-darkness his face was indistinct as a blurred photograph. Then the upright pencil wavered from the perpendicular. Slowly, like a reversed pendulum, or the arm of a metronome, it swung in a short arc from right to left and back again. His eyes followed it, converging on each other until it seemed he made a silly grimace. The silver rod paused in its course, wavered like a tree caught in a sudden wind, and dropped with a soft thud to the carpet.

The medium's head fell back against the cushions of his chair, his eyelids drooped and in a moment came the sound of measured breathing, only slightly stertorous, scarcely more noticeable than the ticking of the clock downstairs. I knit my brows and shook my head in annoyance. I could have simulated a more convincing trance. If he thought we could be imposed upon by such a palpable bit of trickery. . . .

"O-o-o-oh!" Georgine Jaquay exclaimed softly. She had raised one hand to her throat.

I felt a sudden tenseness. Issuing from Peteros' lips was a thin column of smoke, as if he had inhaled deeply from a cigar. Yet it was not ordinary smoke. It had an oddly luminous quality, as if its particles were microscopic opals that glowed

with their own inward fire, and instead of coming in a series of short puffs, as cigar smoke would have come from his mouth, it flowed in steady, even stream, like steam escaping from a simmering kettle.

"*Regardez, s'il vous plait*, Friend Tröwbridge," de Grandin whispered half belligerently. "I tell you it is psychoplasm—soul stuff!"

The cloud of luminescent vapor drifted slowly toward the ceiling, then as if wafted by an unfelt zephyr coiled and circled toward the wall pierced by the curtained windows, and slowly, more like dripping water than a cloud of steam or smoke, began to trickle down the wall until it covered it completely.

It is difficult to describe what happened next. Slowly in the opalescent vapor that obscured the wall there seemed to generate small sparks of bluish light, mere tiny points of phosphorescence, and gradually, but with a gathering speed, they multiplied until they floated like a swarm of dancing midgits circling round each other till they joined to form small nebulae of brightness large as gleaming cigarette ends.

The nebulae became more numerous, touched each other, coalesced as readily as rain drops brought together, till they formed a barrier of eerie, intense bluish light.

There was eeriness, uncanniness about it, but it was not terrifying. Instead of fear I felt a sort of gentle

melancholy. Vague, long-forgotten memories wafted through my mind . . . a girl's soft laugh, the touch of a warm hand, the echo of the muted whisper of a once-loved voice, the subtle fragrance of old hopes and aspirations.

Half dazzled, wholly mystified by the phenomenon, I watched the luminous curtain.

A sort of cloudiness appeared in its bright depths, at first no more than a dim, unformed network of small dots and dashes, but gradually they built up a pattern. As when an image appears on the copper of a halftone plate in its acid bath, a picture took form on the surface of the glowing curtain. As if through the proscenium of a theatre—or on a motion picture screen—we looked into another room.

I recognized it instantly, so did Georgine Jaquay, for I heard her gasp, "Why, it's the hall of this house!"

"*Taisez-vous!*" de Grandin snapped. "Be silent!"

It was the hall we had come through less than ten minutes before, yet somehow it was not the same. A great fire blazed on the wrought-metal andirons and in a pair of brass candlesticks tallow dips were burning. The lights and shadows shifted constantly, but such illumination as there was seemed to do little more than stain the darkness. The door through which we had come opened and a middle-aged Negro dressed in a suit of



coarse tow came into the apartment, bending almost double under the weight of a brass-bound trunk of sole leather.

He paused uncertainly a moment, seemed to turn as if to hear some command shouted at him from outside, then shambled toward the stairway.

The door, which had swung partly shut, was kicked back violently, and across the sill a man stepped with a woman in his arms.

He was a big man, tall and heavy-set, with enormous shoulders and great depth of chest, dressed in the fashion of a hundred years and more

ago. His suit of heavy woolen stuff was snuff-colored, made with a long coat and breeches reaching to his knees, and his brown stockings were of knitted wool but little better than those of the Negro.

I guessed his age as somewhere near fifty, for there were streaks of gray in the long hair that he wore plaited in a queue and in the short dark reddish beard and mustache that masked his lower face. He had a big nose, dark hawk-eyes, broad low forehead and high-jutting cheekbones. His skin was darkly tanned, and though he had few wrinkles they were deep ones.

He was, I thought, a well-to-do farmer, perhaps a merchant sea captain. Certainly he was no gentleman, and just as certainly he was a hard customer, tricky and unscrupulous in bargaining and fierce and ruthless in a fight.

Of the woman we could see little, for a long hooded cloak of dark blue linsey-woolsey covered her from head to heels. What was at once apparent, however, was that she did not snuggle in his arms. She neither held his shoulders nor put her arms about his neck, merely lay quiescent in his grasp as if she rested after an exhausting ordeal, or realized the futility of struggling.

But when he set her on her feet we saw that she was very delicately made, not tall but seeming taller than her actual height because of extreme slenderness. She was pretty, almost beautiful, with a soft cream-

and-carnation skin, bronze hair that positively flamed in the firelight, and eyes of luminous greenish violet with the wondering expression of a hurt child.

The man said something to her and with a start I realized we witnessed a pantomime, a scene of vibrant life and action soundless as an old-time moving picture, but legible in meaning as sky-writing on a windless day.

We saw her shake her small head in negation, then as he echoed his peremptory demand hold out her hands in a gesture of entreaty. Her face was bloodless and her eyes suffused with tears, but if she had been a bird and he a cat her appeal could not have been more futile. Abruptly he seized her left hand and raised it to a level with her eyes, and on its third finger we saw the great, heavy plain gold band that marked her as a matron.

For a moment he stood thus, then flung the little hand from him as if it were a bit of dross and grasped the trembling girl in his arms, crushed her to him and bruised her shrinking lips with kisses that betrayed no trace of love but were afire with blazing passion.

When he released her she shrank back, cheeks aflame with outraged blood and eyes almost filmy with nausea, but as he repeated his command she crept rather than walked to the stairway and mounted it slowly, holding fast to the wrought-brass handrail for support.

The man turned toward the kitchen, bellowing an order and into the hall stole another girl about the age of her whom he had just mauled so lustfully. She was scarce larger than a child, with delicately formed features, short wavy brown hair clustering round her ears and neck in tiny ringlets, and large dark eyes as gentle—and as frightened—as a gazelle's.

Despite the almost shapeless gown of woolen stuff that hung on her we saw her figure was exquisite, with high breasts, narrow hips and lean, small waist. She bore a straw-wrapped stone demijohn stopped with a broken corncob, and at his order took a pewter tankard from the mantel and poured some of the colorless contents of her jar into it.

"More!" We could not hear the word, but it required no skill in lip-reading to know what he ordered, and with a shrug that was no more than a flutter of her shapely shoulders she splashed an added half-pint of liquor into the beaker.

It was obvious she was afraid of him, for she stayed as far away as she could, and her large eyes watched him furtively. When she had filled the mug she stood back quickly, pretending to be busy with recorking the bottle, but obviously eager to stay out of reach.

Her stratagem was futile, for when he downed the draft he wiped his mouth upon his cuff and held out his hand. "Kiss it!" we saw, rather than heard him order.

She took his rough paw in her delicate gold hands and bent her sleek head over it, but he would not let her kiss its back.

"Not that way!" he bade roughly, and obediently she turned it over and pressed her lips to its palm.

Why he demanded this peculiar form of homage I had no idea, but evidently de Grandin understood its implication, for I heard him mutter, "*Sale bete*—dirty beast!"

The bearded man threw back his head and laughed a laugh that must have filled the house with its bellow, then half playfully but wholly viciously he struck the girl across the face with a back-handed blow that sent her reeling to a fall beside the tiled hearth of the fireplace.

We saw him beckon her imperiously, saw her rise trembling to her feet and slink toward him, her wide eyes fearful, her lips trembling. Nearer she crept, shaking her head from side to side, begging mutely for mercy, and when she was within arm's length he seized her as a pouncing beast might grasp its prey.

As a terrier might shake a rat he shook her, swaying her slim shoulders till her head bobbed giddily and her short curls waved like wind-whipped bunting round her ears. Protesting helplessly she opened her mouth and the force with which he shook her drove her teeth together on her tongue so that a little stream of blood came from the corners of her mouth. Then, not content with this punishment, he struck her with

his fist, knocking her to the floor, then raising her again that he might strike her down once more. Three times he hit her with his knotted fist, and every blow drew blood.

When he was done he left her in a little crumbled heap beside the hearthstone, her slim gold hands held to her face and bright blood dripping from her nose, her lips and her bruised cheeks.

De Grandin whispered venomously, "*Pardieu*, he was a species of a stinking swine, that one!"

The big man wiped his mouth upon his sleeve once more and, swaying slightly from the effect of the potent apple-jack, made for the stairway up which the girl he had borne into the house had crept.

THE PICTURE BEFORE US began to fade, not growing dimmer but apparently dissolving like a cloud of steam before a current of air, and in a moment little dots and lines of color danced and moved across the luminous screen, forming figures like the prisms of a kaleidoscope, then gradually merging to depict another scene.

Not very different from its present aspect, save that its lawn was not so well kept, the front yard of the house spread before us. It was early evening, and from the marshes—long since filled in and built over—rose a soft, light mist, silvery, unearthly, utterly still.

An earlier wind had blown the fallen leaves across the bricked walk

with its low box borders, and the man and woman walking away from us kicked them from their path, rustling them against their feet as children love to do in autumn. At the lower end of the footway they paused and as the girl turned her face up to her escort we recognized the young woman we had seen borne into the house. The moonlight brought them into clear-cut definition.

The man was young, about the girl's age, and bore a strong resemblance to her, obviously a family likeness. His clothes and linen were threadbare but scrupulously clean, and his lean drawn face showed the effect of high ambition and slender resources.

We saw her arms creep up around his neck, not passionately, but tenderly, like the tendrils of a vine, as she raised her lips for his kiss. A moment they stood thus in silent embrace, then she unclasped her arms from his neck and he turned away, walking down the moonlit highroad with no backward glance and with squared shoulders, like a man who has made final, immutable decision.

Once more the scene was obscured, then took on new form, and we saw the white girl and the mulatress working feverishly packing a small nail-studded trunk. They folded linen underwear and sprinkled it with crumbled dry lavender, pressed a woolen dress down on the antique lingerie, added several pairs of cotton stockings and a pair of square-

toed little buckled shoes. The box was packed and strapped, the girl ran to the door, but paused upon the threshold, the joy wiped from her face as sunlight disappears before a sudden cloud.

In the entrance stood the bearded man, and over one shoulder, as a butcher might have held a new-slaughtered calf, he bore the body of the young man we had seen before. Blood trickling from a scalp-wound told us how the boy had been bludgeoned, and on the barrel of the antique horse-pistol in the big man's right hand there was a smear of blood to which a few brown hairs adhered.

Methodically as if he followed a rehearsed plan, he dropped the unconscious man on the bed, retraced his steps to the door and returned with three short lengths of iron chain which he proceeded to fasten round the necks of the two women and the swooning man.

Amazingly the women made no effort to resist but stood as dumbly and quiescently as well-trained horses waiting to be harnessed as he latched the fetters on their throats. Perhaps the memory of past beatings told them that submissiveness was wiser, perhaps they realized the hopelessness of entreaty or effort.

It was very quickly accomplished, and in a moment the big man had shouldered the unconscious youth again, tucked the little trunk beneath his free arm, and nodded to-

ward the door. Without a word of protest or entreaty the women went before him, holding the free ends of their neck chains in their hands as if to still their clinking.

We looked into a little room, perhaps some twelve feet square, stone-floored, stone-walled, stone-ceilinged. It was darker than a moonless midnight, but somehow we could distinguish objects. About the walls were small partitioned spaces rising four deep, tier on tier, like oversized pigeonholes, and each was closed with a stone slab in which a heavy ringbolt had been set.

Something like a swarm of small red ants seemed crawling up the backs of my knees and my spine. One did not need to be an antiquarian to recognize the crypts of an old family tomb.

Something stirred in the darkness, and as I strained my eyes toward it I saw the huddled form of a woman. I knew it for a woman by the long red hair that hung upon its head, but otherwise, although it had been stripped of clothing, it was almost unclassifiable. Emaciation was so far advanced that she was little more than a mummy. Knee and elbow-joints stood out against the staring skin like apples on broomsticks, the hip-bones showed like ploughshares each side the pelvis, the ribs were like the bars of a grating, and every tooth was outlined through the shrunken lips.

The creature bent its skull-face to the stone pavement and licked a lit-

the moisture from the trickle of a tiny spring-fed rivulet that crossed the flags, then tried to rouse itself to a sitting posture, tried vainly again, and sank back limply. Slowly, painfully, as if it fought paralysis, it edged across the cold damp stones of the floor, stretched out a bony, tendon-scored hand toward another thing that crouched against the farther wall.

This was—or had been—a man, but now it was no better than a skeleton held in articulation by the skin stretched drum-tight over it. It seemed to rouse to semi-consciousness by the other's movement, and tried desperately to reach the withered hand stretched toward it. In vain.

The chains that tethered the whimpering woman-lich and her companion were barely long enough to stretch from their ring-bolts to the floor, leaving the captives just length of leash enough to lie on the floor, but not permitting them sufficient movement to reach each other, even when their arms were stretched to fullest extent.

And as we watched the prisoners struggle futilely to bring their dying hands together we saw something flutter feebly in the darkness at the rear of the tomb. Chained like the other two the golden-skinned mulatress lay against the wall, and constantly her head turned from side to side and her emaciated body shook with unrelenting spasms.

"*Cordieu*, but it was monstrous,

that!" de Grandin whispered grittily. "Not content with making them die horribly by slow starvation; not content with making it impossible for them so much as to join hands in their extremity, he chained that other poor one with them that they should be denied all privacy, even in the hour of death!"

He struck his hands together sharply. "*Monsieur!*" he called. "*Monsieur Peteros!*"

The gruesome scene before us faded as if it had been frescoed on wax melting in quick heat, and through the semi-darkness of the room there swirled a wraithlike cloud of gleaming vapor that hovered like a nimbus above the medium a moment, then, as if he had inhaled it, was absorbed by him.

"Eh?" Peteros murmured sleepily. "Did I go into a trance? What did I say?"

"Not a word, *Monsieur*," de Grandin told him. "You were as dumb as an infant oyster, but through your help we are much wiser. Yes. Certainly. Stay here and rest, for you must be exhausted. The rest of us have duties to perform. Come, *mes amis*," he looked at me and the Jaquays in turn, "let us go to that amobinable tomb, that never-to-be-quite-sufficiently-anatematized sepulchre. We are a century and more too late—we cannot rescue them, *helas*, but we can give them what they most desire. Of a surety."

With a crowbar we forced back

the rust-bound iron door of the Tofte mausoleum and after standing back a moment for the outer air to enter de Grandin led the way into the tomb, playing the beam of his flashlight before him.

"*Voyez! Voila quel!*" he ordered as the shifting shaft of light stabbed through the murky darkness.

Death lay at our feet. Arranged in orderly array as if they waited articulation by an osteologist were the bones of three skeletons. Dangling from the ring-bolts of three stone-sealed crypts to the floor beside the skulls were lengths of rust-bitten iron chain. The disintegration of the prisoners' upper spinal columns had loosed the loops of iron latched about their throats. We had no difficulty determining their sex.

Even if the widely-opened sciatic notches of the pelvic bones and the smoothly curved angular fronto-nasal articulation of the skulls had not denoted the female skeletons to de Grandin's practiced eye and mine the pitiful relics lying by two of the skulls would have told their story—the amethyst-set gold earrings of the white girl and the patina-encrusted copper loops that once had hung in the mulatress' little ears.

The Frenchman stepped back, bowing as if he addressed three living people. "*Mes pauvres,*" he announced softly, "we are come to give you release from your earth-bound state. Your pleas have been heard; you shall be together in what remains of the flesh. The evil man

who boasted of his better, sounder sleep—*parbleu*, but Jules de Grandin makes a monkey out of him!"

"It is a case for the coroner," he told us as we walked back to the house. "We need not tell the things that we saw in the bedroom. The circumstances of the disappearance of Madame Tofte and Monsieur Van Brundt as they appear in the historical records, together with the advertisement crafty old Monsieur Jacob broadcast for the return of the poor Celeste, will be sufficient to establish their identity. As to the manner of their death—*eh bien*, does it not proclaim itself? But certainly."

He smiled grimly. "And that old hypocrite who lies so snugly in St. Chrysostom's churchyard—though it is late in overtaking him his sin has found him out at last. The jury of the coroner cannot help but name him as the murderer of those poor ones."

THE DINNER AT the Berkeley-York had been a huge success. *Consomme de tortue vert* with sherry, *huitres Francois* with Chablis, *truite Margery* with Meursault, *coq au vin* with Nuits St. Georges and finally *crepes Sussettes* with cointreau.

As the waiter poured the coffee and Chartreuse I fully expected to hear de Grandin purr.

"I suppose it's your theory that the stone and timbers of Tofte House held a certain psychic quality derived from association with the

tragedy of Marise Tofte and Merthou Van Brundt, or that these unhappy lovers in the stress of their emotion passed on lasting thought-emanations to their inanimate surroundings?" I asked him.

"I would not quite say that," said Jules de Grandin. "This, I think, is what we might call a genuine ghost story, one where the earthbound spirits of the dead, denied the rites of Christian burial, sought constantly for help from the living.

"Consider, if you please: That Madame Marise and Monsieur Merthou were about to elope, accompanied by the slave girl Celeste, we have no doubt at all. Also, after seeing what a *bete bas* she had for husband one cannot blame her.

"Next, we know the naughty old Monsiieur Jacob laid a trap for them. He pretended to go on a long voyage, gave them barely time to renew love and make plans for eloping then *pouf!* swooped down on them like a cat on two luckless mice. The sad rest we know also.

"When he had chained them like brute beasts they died all miserably in the tomb, and their poor, starved bodies lay unburied. What then? For years they sought to tell their plight to those who came to live in that house, but always failed. Those whom they begged for help were frightened and ran off.

"But finally these unhappy cousins who were thwarted in their love were visited by cousins fate had given to each other. And so it came

about that we, with Monsieur Penteros' assistance, found their pitiful remains, had their killer branded as a murderer, and after proper rites laid them in consecrated ground."

A grim expression settled on his lips. "That poor Celeste, the slave girl, she gave me some trouble," he confided.

"How's that?" asked Georgine Jaquay.

"The sexton of St. Chrysostom's told me the ground was reserved for the burial of white people exclusively. '*Monsieur,*' I say to him, 'this are no woman, but a skeleton I seek to have interred here, and the skeleton of a young girl of color is white as that of a Caucasian. Besides, if you persist in your pig-odious refusal I shall have to tweak your far from handsome nose.' *Tiens*, he let us bury her beside those whose death she had shared"

Georgine Jaquay gave a short laugh, the sort of laugh a person gives to keep from weeping.

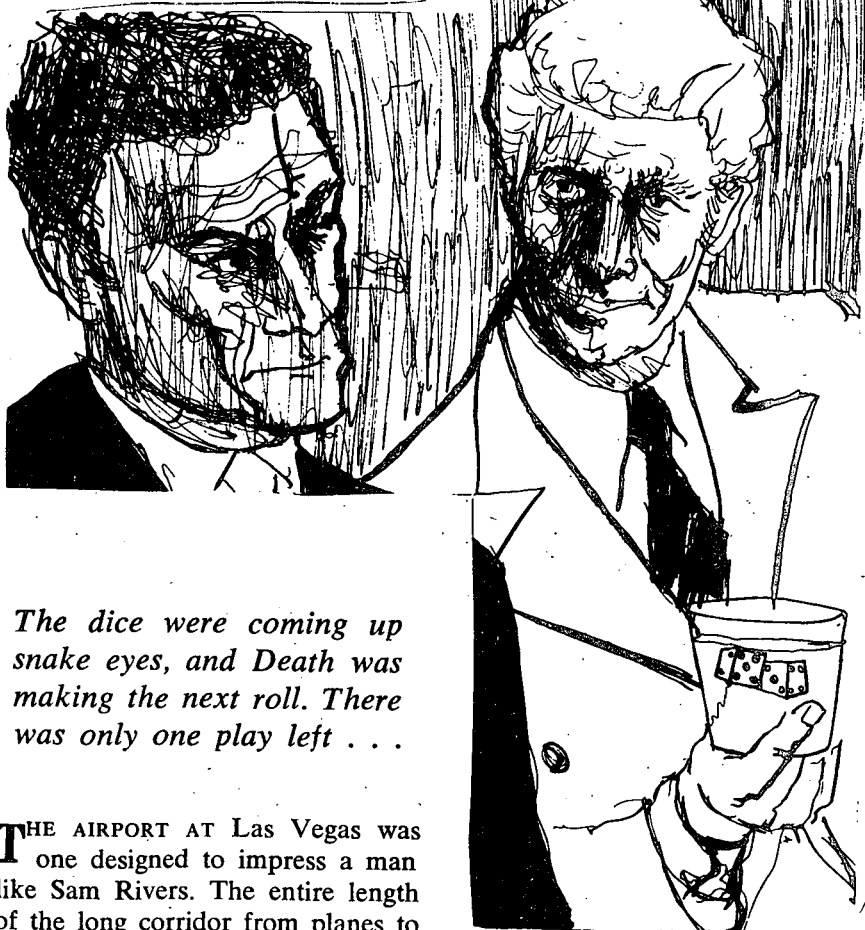
"Do you suppose it was because they were cousins, and George and I are cousins, that they finally found peace through us?" she asked.

De Grandin raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman can achieve. "Who knows, *Madame?* It is, entirely possible," he answered. Then, with one of his elfin grins, "Or possibly it were because you and your husband had the good sense to consult Jules de Grandin. He is a very clever fellow, that one."

DIE - HARD

by

EDWARD D. HOCH



The dice were coming up snake eyes, and Death was making the next roll. There was only one play left . . .

THE AIRPORT AT Las Vegas was one designed to impress a man like Sam Rivers. The entire length of the long corridor from planes to waiting room to shops to baggage

claim was plushly carpeted, and here and there a detailed scale model of one of the Strip casinos loomed up to distract the new arrival. Opposite the ticket counters the clink of coins from a bank of slot machines was almost the only noise a visitor heard. But then it was the sound of the city, just as the honking of taxi horns and the clanging of cable car bells were the sounds of New York and San Francisco.

Those cities, really, were twin homes to Sam Rivers, and he rarely ventured into the heady atmosphere of Vegas. For one thing, the summer heat was oppressive. Even in September he was not one to lounge around the pool while the cloudless sun beat down in ninety-eight degree heat. By night, though, when the flashing signs turned downtown into daylight, when the Strip casinos came a little more alive, it was his place.

He could stand at the crap tables till dawn, pausing only for occasional tries at blackjack or roulette. The very feel of the dice against his palm, especially the oversized, sharp-cornered dice that most casinos used, gave him a feeling of rightness, of command. Those dice could roll any number he wished, and often they did. He won six hundred dollars one weekend, and the heat did not seem quite so oppressive.

That was in July, the weekend he met Darla, the weekend they de-

cided to try for a killing with loaded dice.

The gamblers will tell you it's impossible to bring a pair of loaded dice into a Las Vegas crap game, and they're very nearly right. For the most part, the casinos use large red dice of translucent plastic, with sharp edges and distinctive spots printed on the surface. Each die is etched with the name of the casino and a distinctive serial number, which is recorded each time a new set of dice is put into play.

Because Darla worked there, Rivers decided quite early to tackle the crap table at the Twelve Caesars. Now, passing the scale model in the airport lobby, he stopped to study it once more. It showed the statue garden and the fountains, and the clover-leaf swimming pool around back. Rivers did not need to see the crap tables inside. Those he knew by heart.

The Twelve Caesars, like the other casinos, used distinctive dice at their tables. The spots were oversized and slightly recessed, not flush-painted like most of the other Vegas casinos. Each die had a serial number stamped in blue on the deuce side. Rivers had studied them closely, and then purchased a dozen pair at various souvenir shops around Vegas.

He took a cab from the airport to the International where he was staying. It was a long block from the Strip, but close enough for his purposes. Once in his room he un-

packed the dozen pair of dice and carefully inspected them on the wide blue bedspread. Darla had thought they'd be impossible to load, until he told her about the dice cheats who'd taken a Vegas casino for a quarter of a million dollars one night back in 1951. And the three Americans who'd switched in crooked dice at the Monte Carlo casino in 1956.

On top of that bedspread, the dozen pair of dice that he carefully loaded looked no different from the real thing. He'd done his work well. Darla had phoned him in San Francisco the numbers of some fifty pair of dice in the locked casino stockroom, and he didn't bother to ask how she'd gotten in there to copy them. From the list Rivers had chosen the dozen numbers which could most easily be forged onto the souvenir dice already in his possession.

Thus, 537 was made into 587 without too much difficulty, and 117 became 712. The numerals were not all perfect, but he was certain they'd stand up under a casual inspection.

The actual loading of the dice had been a bit more difficult. It took hours of careful work to fill the large spots with enough metallic zinc paint to influence the rolls. The weight of the paint added only a fraction of an ounce to the dice, but it was enough to insure a roll of seven about once every three

times instead of the usual once every six times.

The beauty of River's system was that the loaded dice could pass out of his hands to the next player and he could still win. His first bet would always be to pass—roll a seven or eleven. But if any other number came up, he'd bet against it, knowing the odds were still on a seven coming up next. He'd lose a few bets, but he'd win the vast majority.

The scheme was foolproof, depending only upon his waiting at the crap table until one of his twelve pair of numbered dice was put into play. Then a quick substitution and he was on his way.

He placed the twelve pair of loaded dice into the specially sewn pockets inside his jacket and took a cab over to the Twelve Caesars. Later he would rent a car, but not quite yet.

The casino area was full of action and the chattering noise of the slot machines. He walked through it, playing a few dimes in the slots, and then drifted over to the craps tables. Above, the dark glass of the one-way mirrors hid lookout men who could observe each game, but he knew the posts were rarely occupied.

Rivers watched the craps action for a time, noting that players occasionally asked for a fresh pair of dice. This was one thing he feared, but if he worked it right it could be to his advantage.

Then he drifted over to play some more machines, and finally settled into one of the softly padded chairs in the Keno area. He saw at once that Darla was working, moving back and forth between the players and the counter, taking their Keno cards up to have a duplicate made, collecting money and paying off winners.

Darla Moore was a tall blonde with great legs who'd worked as a chorus girl in the Lido show for one season, before leaving to join a singing group. When the group folded, she'd taken the temporary job as Keno girl. There were hundreds of such girls working the Strip and downtown casinos. The only qualification for such a job seemed to be legs that looked good beneath the brief tunics or miniskirts they all wore. Darla qualified on that count.

Rivers knew next to nothing about her early life, or even what her real name might have been before her involvement in show business. The only important thing was that they trusted each other and they both wanted money.

He handed her the Keno card with his money and she went off to the counter, long legs moving with the smooth precision of a dancer. Presently she returned with his copy and handed it over without a word. He glanced at it and said nothing. In addition to the numbers he'd picked, she'd circled two others, three and five. That meant the dice

in question were in use today, and at tables three and five.

He waited till the twenty Keno numbers were called and then stood up. It was time for some craps.

Table three had a half dozen people at it, all men. Rivers watched for a time, but couldn't read the serial numbers on the dice in play. He finally bought fifty dollars in chips and started betting. When the dice reached him he glanced down casually. 956—not one of the numbers he needed.

"How about a fresh pair?" he asked.

The stickman nodded and rolled five pair of new dice onto the felt table. Rivers could see only a few of the numbers, and none were the ones he needed. Finally he picked a pair at random, 443, still no good to him. He rolled a few times and lost, then drifted over to table five.

This was a high-stakes table, with a ten dollar minimum bet, and only two other men were playing it. One man, with bushy white hair and what might have been a perpetual frown, rolled an eleven and collected as Rivers watched. Then he lost and the dice passed on. Rivers scooped them up and glanced at the serial number—587. He tried to be calm as he rolled them once. They came up seven, an honest win.

By then he'd slipped the loaded dice numbered 587 from his inner pocket and palmed them. The substitution was easy. He made three passes in a row, winning a total of



seventy-five dollars, and then passed the dice. As the next man rolled a seven, he collected again. The man rolled a four and he lost, but then he bet on the *Don't Pass* line and won. He stayed at the table for a half hour, gradually building his winnings until he was more than seven hundred dollars ahead.

Then the man with the bushy white hair suddenly asked for a change of dice. Rivers cursed under his breath, but stayed in for another time around the table, betting small. He lost twenty-five dollars and drifted away.

Darla still had another hour's work in the Keno parlor, and even then he knew it would be dangerous to be seen with her at the Twelve Caesars. He headed for one of the

many bars that ringed the casino area and ordered a scotch and water. He'd been sipping it for a few minutes when the white-haired man from the craps table sat down next to him.

"You had a lucky run," the man said, digging into his pocket for a match.

"Yeah," Rivers mumbled.

"Must have won six, seven hundred."

"About that.."

"Come to Vegas often?"

"Not too often," Rivers said, hoping the man would go away.

"This is quite a place," the man said, opening the palm of his hand to show a pair of dice.

Rivers nodded and said nothing. The serial number of one die was 587. The white-haired man had somehow obtained his pair of loaded dice.

"I can show you a good trick," the man continued.

He pulled Rivers' drink toward him and fished out the ice cube. Then, before Rivers could move, he dropped one die gently into the glass. It started settling through the scotch and water to the bottom, then did a sudden twist as the loaded side shifted in the liquid. The man did the same with the second die, and they watched it flip over in the same way.

"My name is Jonas Milo," the man said quietly. "Next time you ring loaded dice into a game, make sure I'm not watching you."

He sat there smiling, waiting for Rivers to speak. He might have been a devil, or a con man. He certainly wasn't a cop.

"What do you want?" Sam Rivers managed to ask when he'd recovered himself. "What's your angle?"

Jonas Milo smiled. "You were good with those dice. The stickman never tumbled."

"How'd you get them? You a lookout for the casino?"

"Hardly. I palmed them while I was picking another pair." He signaled the bartender for a drink and lit another cigarette. "What's your name, anyway?"

Rivers hesitated a bit, then remembered he'd foolishly registered under his real name at the hotel. There was no point lying about it now.

"Sam Rivers," he said.

"All right, Sam. You look like a smart fellow. Here's my offer. Play along with me and you're home free. Otherwise, I finger you to the casino boys and you lose a few teeth in an alley somewhere."

"They wouldn't believe you."

"They'd believe me. They hate to lose money." He sipped his drink. "The ones you see out front, all smiles, aren't the ones you have to worry about. Try welshing on a gambling debt, or skipping town without making good on a bum check, and you'll see the other side."

"You know a lot."

Jonas Milo smiled sadly. "I

learned the hard way. I had a little downtown casino just after the war, before Vegas made it big. I extended too much credit, let too many big losers write checks for their losses. I was out of business in a year. The trouble was, I didn't go for any of that strong-arm stuff. I was in the wrong business."

"You mentioned playing along with you," Rivers said cautiously. "In what way?"

Jonas Milo had fished the dice out of the drink, and now he was studying them with care. "These are good, very good. It would take close study to detect the extra layer of paint on some of the spots. You have more like these?"

Rivers could feel the other dice poking against his ribs. "Maybe."

"What you were doing, Sam, was two-bit stuff. So you made seven hundred. How would you like to make seven thousand, or maybe more?"

"Keep talking."

"I need the dice, as many pairs as you can furnish."

"What for?"

The white-haired man glanced around. There were no customers near them, and the bartender was down at the other end, but he still seemed nervous. "Let's go outside. In these places sometimes even the walls have ears."

Rivers remembered Darla. "I could meet you someplace in a half hour."

Milo pocketed the dice. "The

parking lot behind Circus Circus, down next to Caesar's Palace. Be there, or you're in trouble. I'll be sitting in a tan Chevy."

Rivers watched him walk quickly away, mingling with the crowd around the slot machines. He ordered another drink and downed it fast, anxious to meet Darla when she came off duty.

By the time he went around to the back exit from the employees' dressing rooms, she was just coming out. Her hair was pale and glistening in the twilight, and she wore a raincoat belted loosely around her, even though the temperature was still in the high seventies. He realized at once that she still had on her brief Keno Girl costume underneath.

"How'd you do?" she asked quickly, casting a nervous glance over her shoulder.

"A little less than seven hundred dollars. Your cut will be three hundred fifty dollars."

"Is that all? Some weeks I make that much in tips."

He knew she was exaggerating, needling him for the small take, but in self-defense he told her about Milo. "This guy has a deal of some sort. He says there's big money in it."

"Sam—"

"I know, I know! Look, I'm no kid in this business. If you don't think I can take care of myself maybe you should come along."

"I think I should come along to

meet Mr. Milo, at least. I've got an interest in those dice too, Sam. I risked my job to help you with the serial numbers."

"Come on, then," he decided, because there was no easy way out of it. "We'll take your car."

The little red sports car was conspicuous, even by Vegas standards, but just then he was feeling strangely safe. He felt the way he had when he'd gotten his first job, just out of high school. The world was his, at least this portion of it. He was on the way to close a business deal, with a beautiful girl at his side.

Jonas Milo was waiting behind the Circus Circus, his car parked a bit away from the rows of others.

"Who's she?" he asked when he saw Darla. "She's not part of the deal."

"This is Darla Moore," Rivers explained. "She has a part interest in the dice."

"She's not part of the deal," he repeated. "If too many people know about this thing—"

"You're cutting me in," Darla said firmly, "or there isn't any deal. So far I've taken all the risks."

Jonas Milo sighed and started talking, addressing his remarks to Rivers. "At the Twelve Caesars they keep a special little room, called the celebrity room, where the big entertainers can gamble without being disturbed. In that room, when it's operating, there's no house limit and nobody talks about cheating. Usually there's only the big name

and a few of his friends, playing against the house."

"So?"

"So tonight Billy Conrad is playing there, after his midnight show. He's got a party of about a dozen here with him. He uses your dice and you get ten percent of everything he wins."

"Billy Conrad?" He knew the name, of course. Conrad had come up fast as a hard rock singer and producer of low-budget underground movies. He was headlining the week's bill at the Twelve Caesars. "He'd go for cheating?"

Jonas Milo snorted. "Conrad would cheat his own grandmother."

"What's your cut?"

"Ten percent, same as you."

"Why you doing it? Conrad your son or something?"

Milo laughed out loud. "I don't think the bastard ever had a father. No, I'm just in it for the kicks. The guys who started the Twelve Caesars did it on some of my money. One of them was my credit manager in the old casino." His smile faded. "I carry a grudge a long time, for a guy like Kail."

"I don't know," Rivers said, hesitating.

"Why not?" Darla argued. "Conrad takes all the risks. It's found money!"

Rivers could see there was no arguing her out of it. "All right," he said. "Ten percent."

Milo sighed in the darkness of the auto. "Give me the dice."

"Oh, no. You give me an advance for the dice. I've got eleven more pair. You get them for one hundred dollars a pair, cash on delivery."

"You drive a hard bargain, Sam. I don't have eleven hundred on me."

"Then get it from your buddy Conrad. There's time before his dinner show."

"All right."

Rivers nodded. "I'll come with you. Follow us in your car, Darla."

The white-haired man grinned in the dimness. "You're suddenly a professional at this."

"I learn fast."

They drove back to the Twelve Caesars, down the length of the Strip that was only now coming alive for the evening's entertainment. Everywhere neon flashed and trembled, beckoning like a lewd mistress. Rivers could see his hotel on the horizon, towering above the landscape to the east. He suddenly realized he was getting hungry.

"Here we are," Milo said, turning into the parking lot at the Twelve Caesars. "Why don't you give me the dice now?"

"We'll see Conrad and get some money."

They entered through the rear door that Darla always used, and Milo passed the guard on duty with a friendly wave. Rivers followed close behind. It was just eight o'clock, and he knew the dinner show would be starting in fifteen minutes.

Jonas Milo knocked on the dressing room door and stuck his head in. "Got a minute before show time, Billy? Want you to meet a friend of mine."

Billy Conrad was dressed in skin-tight gold pants and a loose-fitting silk shirt. His hair was long and his eyes cloudy. He might have been high on pot, but Rivers wasn't certain. "Billy, this is the man I called you about, the man with the dice."

"Yeah," Billy said, not looking at Rivers. "I gotta go on in ten minutes."

"Billy, he wants an advance of eleven hundred dollars for the dice—a hundred a pair."

Conrad moved over to his dressing table without a word and produced the bills from somewhere. There were eleven of them, one hundred dollars each. Milo smiled and passed them on to Rivers. "Here, Sam. Now the dice."

Rivers unbuttoned his jacket and began removing the dice from his pockets. He gave them all eleven pairs.

"When will I meet you for the payoff?" he asked.

"Same place. The parking lot, at dawn. Come alone. That girl can be trouble."

"All right."

"And stay clear of here tonight. If you're holding out any more funny dice, don't try them tonight."

"I won't."

Billy Conrad drew himself up and

sprayed his throat with a half-full atomizer.

"Get out now," he told them, still not looking directly at Rivers. "I gotta go on."

Sam Rivers followed Milo back out through the rear exit. They parted by the cars, and Rivers went to the little red one where Darla was waiting.

"How'd it go?" she asked.

"Smooth. I got the money."

"Let's go back to your hotel. I'm not on again till tomorrow noon."

Driving across Desert Inn Road to the International, he had a thought. "We could blow this town tonight, not wait for Milo and his money. Hell, we're eighteen hundred dollars richer, almost!"

"Blow it for where?"

"San Francisco, back east, anywhere at all."

"You said there might be seven thousand dollars more. Or ten thousand dollars. We're supposed to give that up?"

"I don't know, Darla. Sometimes I don't like it. The whole thing seems too easy."

"Well, I'm not leaving. I'm staying."

He sighed and turned into the International parking lot. Ahead, the irregular flicker of the hotel's eternal flame lit the darkness. If she stayed, he knew that he would stay, too. He just hoped things would go well back in the celebrity room at the Twelve Caesars.

Darla Moore was still sleeping in

the big bed when he left the room just before dawn. There was no point in waking her, and he'd rather be alone anyway, when he met with Jonas Milo. He took Darla's little red car and drove back across Desert Inn Road. Even at this hour the streets were far from empty. The bars and casinos never closed in Vegas, and there were no clocks to remind one of the time.

Even the parking lot behind Circus Circus had a score or more cars in it, but he spotted Milo's auto without difficulty. He pulled up beside it and got out.

Jonas Milo was slouched behind the wheel, barely moving. He looked up as Rivers opened the door and tried to speak. There was blood on his mouth and nose.

"What in hell happened?" Rivers asked, feeling the panic rising in his throat.

"I—" Milo held up his right hand, gasping in pain.

"What'd they do to you?"

"My finger," he gasped.

"Milo, tell me what happened!"

"Conrad bungled it. He made some foolish move and Kail found the loaded dice in his pocket. They couldn't damage his face or his voice, so they broke all ten of his fingers. Somewhere in the middle of it he told them about me. And you. They found me and broke one finger. Kail said it was my ten percent."

"God!"

"I think they followed me, Rivers. You better get out of here."

Sam Rivers glanced around, seeing for the first time the car with three men sitting inside. He slid out of Milo's car without a word and jumped into the red auto. The other car began moving, trying to block his exit. He swerved around, heading the other way, driving blindly and hoping there was another way out.

The little car sideswiped a light pole and almost overturned. Before he could get control again they were on him, yanking open the door, pulling him from the driver's seat.

"Wait! Wait a minute!" he pleaded.

"We don't like loaded dice in this town, buddy." The man who spoke was big and brutal. He grabbed the front of Rivers' shirt and twisted as he spoke. "We want to be sure you don't make any more." He slammed Rivers in the face with the heel of his hand and watched while he crumpled to the asphalt.

"Give me a break!"

The man hesitated and turned to one of the others who stood in the shadow. "What do you say, Kail? Should I break a few bones?" He was grinning as he asked it.

Kail stepped forward. He was an older man, slim and still handsome, but with hard, bleak eyes. A professional. The sort of man who would double-cross someone like Jonas Milo. "What sort of a break do you deserve, punk?"

Rivers scraped his hands across the rough pavement, trying to rise. He thought of Darla back in the hotel room and wished he was with her.

"Let me roll the dice," he pleaded, hurrying the words before they hit him again. "If I win, you let me go."

The man who'd pulled him from the car kicked out now with his foot, catching Rivers in the side. "The games are over, punk!"

But Kail interrupted.

"Let him roll the dice," he said. "It might be entertaining."

Someone tossed down a pair of red cubes and Rivers snatched them up. The feel of them against his palm seemed to give him new life. "Thanks," he managed to reply. They were flush-spotted, not the loaded ones he'd brought into town.

"Roll," Kail said sharply. "Let's get this over with." The sky was brightening. It was almost dawn.

Rivers held his breath for a moment and then let fly with the dice. They clattered across the asphalt and came to rest. A five and a three. "Eight's his point," the burly man announced.

"Roll."

"Give me time to think," Rivers pleaded.

The big man snapped open a switchblade. "Roll, punk! It's almost daylight."

He rolled. This time it was a three and a one. He hadn't made his point.

"Roll again."

The dice stopped at six and four. Still no eight. He was beginning to tremble, and his fingers were cold.

"Come on eight," he breathed.

"Come on!"

It was five and five. No point.

"Roll!" the man with the knife rasped.

And this time Sam Rivers knew it would come up a losing seven. He'd never been more certain of anything in his life. *Seven the loser!* He could almost hear the stickman calling it.

He looked up at the man with the knife, at the cold eyes of Kail, at the rising sun.

There was only one chance. He threw the dice full into the face of the man with the knife and tried to scramble away.

The man cursed and for a moment he thought he'd make it. But then the knife flashed down in the dawn, catching the first glitter of the rising sun, and he felt it go in between his ribs, slicing through coat and shirt and skin.

Rivers slid sideways, coughing, bleeding, and went down. He thought again of Darla, and of San Francisco, and then he heard Kail's raspy voice from somewhere far away. "Hell, the dice came up eight. The punk made his point."

He rolled over, aware that his mouth was filling with blood, and tried to grin. He'd made his point. Maybe this was his lucky day after all.

THE GUILTY ONES

Outside, a good man lay dead. Inside, a wan little mistress of murder wove a spell of chaste evil that came from hell.



by

MORRIS HERSHMAN

THE GIRL SAT limply in the hard black chair, a hand over her eyes. She held a kerchief which had been wadded into a ball and was wet to the touch.

She looked up when the door

opened suddenly. The man who walked into this large room was a stranger to her. He was at least six feet tall and his hard features were compact. His gray eyes studied her in sympathy.

"Miss Kay Carson." It wasn't a question. His voice turned out to be deep and pleasant. "I'm Detective George Nowlin."

"Yes." Her words came out slowly. "Don't try to make it easy for me, please. Just tell me if the worst has happened."

"I'm going to," Nowlin said, startling her more than she would have admitted. "The man died about two minutes ago."

Kay Carson had been expecting it, but she gasped as if gripped by a stunning surprise. A tendril of straw-blonde hair drifted over her right eye and moved like a pendulum, but she ignored it.

"My fault," she insisted on a flattened-out voice. "If not for me, the man would still be alive. I killed him. I'm a murderess."

"In that case, Miss Carson, I ought to put you under arrest," the man said calmly, but without taking a step in her direction.

"You certainly should arrest me," Kay Carson agreed with unexpected fierceness. "Why don't you?"

"Well, I tell you what I'll do instead of arresting you, Miss," Nowlin said gently. "I'll sentence you to have some breakfast with me. There's a small place not far from here and I'm hungry."

The recollection of living by a daily routine made Kay Carson wince. "How can you even think about that sort of thing after what's happened?"

"The world hasn't come to an end, Miss," George Nowlin said easily. "Those of us who are left will have to carry on."

"But I killed a man," Kay said faintly.

"All the same you'll have to eat and drink and sooner or later you'll have to use the bathroom. Your life hasn't come to an end."

"I wish—I almost wish—"

"Come, let's breakfast, and you'll change your mind," he said softly. "At the very least I can tell you who pulled the trigger and fired the shot, which you certainly didn't do. I'll convince you we've got the right man, and that'll put your mind at ease."

"There really isn't anything else for me to do, I suppose."

"No job?" Nowlin looked surprised.

"I teach English at the high school level, but I'm on a *per diem* basis, so I don't have to work unless I phone in for an assignment." She winced. "If that could possibly make any difference, now."

"We're both in civil service," Nowlin said, as if that pleased him. "At least neither of us has got the sort of job where you spend most of your working time trying to figure out when to take your vacation and how to use your benefits to the

best advantage. You should be grateful."

Kay Carson wouldn't rise to the bait. She kept her face down and shrugged her light coat around her. With old-fashioned courtesy, Nowlin opened the door for her. The morning was warm and springlike.

George Nowlin led the way to a small restaurant with two night sticks crossed in neon on the signboard. The place was called *Food Beat*. Preoccupied though she was, Kay didn't doubt for a moment the business of the restaurant's major customers.

"A restaurant near a station house nearly always has to be fairly good," Nowlin said idly, giving a cheerful nod to the man back of the counter. "Police eat at such irregular hours that bad food can simply destroy a man, and the customers can get their friends in the Board of Health to come around and close the place up."

He ordered orange juice, warm cereal and a soft-boiled egg and coffee and toast for both of them. Kay said she would take no food at all, so he had to change the order.

"You were going to tell me that you know who did the actual killing," she reminded him as he gazed at her steadily. "Who pulled the trigger, I mean. I know who did the killing."

"Well, let's get the whole story in sequence," George Nowlin said, recalled to a serious matter. "Patrolman Arthur Davidoff was run-

ning towards the Apex jewelry store on King Street at about nine o'clock last night when the burglar alarm had sounded from there. Davidoff must have wanted to make sure that the emergency was under control. His job, don't forget, was to keep the peace."

"I know that much, Mr. Nowlin," she said.

"George, please," he said, and smiled.

Kay Carson was silent. The waiter brought orange juice. Nowlin covered as much of the glass as he could manage with his big hands, then drank the stuff down.

"What were you saying," she asked, then smiled at him, "George?"

Nowlin smiled, too. "Patrolman Davidoff ran into the street, as I was saying, and nearly bumped into you. You called out, shocked, then you practically shouted that a couple of men were fighting on the next block and one of them was carrying a weapon. Davidoff must have known that there could be immediate violence as a result of that fight.

"He looked toward the jewelry shop and saw that the owner, Mr. Kowalsky, had come running out, shouting that he had been robbed. There was no danger of immediate violence at the store, so Davidoff made his decision. He ran to the next block toward the emergency."

"Yes." Kay closed her eyes tightly.

"And while he was running the

jeweler kept shouting and running after him."

"I've never been so frightened in my life," the girl said. "I never will know what made me start to go back there behind them unless it was a morbid curiosity to find out what would happen. People always follow a policeman who looks like he's working, or they stare after him."

Nowlin nodded his head, but she was looking down at her folded hands and didn't see the gesture of understanding.

"Davidoff ran to the fighters and shouted at them to stop," George Nowlin went on heavily. "There was a shot. Davidoff dropped to the ground, mortally wounded. He died on the operating table just a short while ago."

Kay Carson winced. "And if I hadn't told him about the fight, he'd be alive at this moment."

"Davidoff knew he was in a dangerous business."

"Don't you care about what happened?" she asked, surprised. "I would think that you'd be more upset than I am. After all, it could have happened to you, Mr. N—George. You're a policeman, too."

Nowlin looked down, stirring his warm cereal.

"One thing that police work teaches a man is not to take on over tragedy, even if it should happen to one of his own. Let this tragedy upset you and the next one will, too, and you won't be fit for the job. A



policeman has got to develop a hard shell on the outside and appear callous to other people. It's a matter of necessity, but that doesn't mean he's not affected."

"I wish I could develop a shell like yours," Kay Carson said. "Whoever did the killing might go to the electric chair, but I'll have to spend what's left of my life remembering the thing that I did."

"The two instances haven't got anything in common," Nowlin said quietly. "I think you'll learn to live with what's happened. In fact, I'm sure of it."

"I suppose you think I'm being

foolish," the woman said miserably.

"Not all." Nowlin scratched his jaw. "There are any number of advantages to a situation in which you feel guilty. For instance, guilt stops you from doing something when you don't really want to do it. You have a chance to exaggerate your own importance in the scheme of things."

"But I'm not exagg—"

"A lot of people felt guilty when President Kennedy was murdered, remembering all the nasty things that many of them had thought and said about him and feeling that all the hatred had transferred itself to the one crazy man who did that ghastly act. When Marilyn Monroe killed herself, people felt guilty because they had laughed at her and leered at her."

"Maybe so," she said, distracted for the moment.

"Guilt keeps you from having to go on for a while with the burden of day-to-day life, which is often dull and always more difficult than feeling yourself the center of attention. If not for the thrill and luxury of feeling guilt, we might not get so many crimes. A guilty man who is caught finds his life in the hands of the police and the courts and the prison system, so he doesn't have any more responsibilities to speak of. A man who escapes feels that his life is in the hands of fate and that fate may catch up to him. Automatically his life becomes more interesting, so to speak."

"I don't feel that way," she insisted, "and I actually sent a man to his death. Nothing would have happened if I hadn't told the policeman about the argument on the next block."

"You didn't load the gun or fire it and that's how the law defines guilt, in this case," Nowlin said. "The man who did both those things is behind bars now."

"He's admitted it, then?"

"He will," Nowlin said confidently. "The fellow he had been there with, that fellow came in and told what he knew. As a result, Robert Struthers is being questioned at this moment. It's a matter of time before we get a confession from him."

"Maybe he'll confess just to keep the police off his neck," Kay said anxiously. "That must happen, sometime."

"When he confesses he'll give corroboration," Nowlin said. "He'll tell something about the crime that only the real killer could know and that we've been holding out from the public on purpose so we can cross-check the confession. Don't you worry about that, Miss Carson."

"And if he confesses I can never again tell myself I had any big part in what happened—I hope. You're a very comforting man in some important ways, George." She suddenly looked at the warm cereal. "I never thought I'd be hungry again, but I'm beginning to feel famished."

"If you want some of this, I'll order it for you."

He sounded approving, and he meant it. If Kay Carson was eating warm cereal, she wasn't likely to wallow in emotionalism.

She finished the cereal and went through coffee and toast immediately afterwards. Nowlin, completely finished with his meal, sat with hands folded and watched patiently as she ate.

Partly because she was slightly uncomfortable at that gaze of his, he talked quickly. "If only he confesses! It would do so much to make me feel that at least something had been done about what happened."

George Nowlin gave a resigned sigh. "I'll find out how it's going on."

She didn't let him see her relief as he got up and hurried to the cluster of phone booths at the rear. When he came back, having taken longer time than she could have expected, he was nodding to himself purposefully.

"Struthers has confessed to killing patrolman Davidoff," Nowlin said, taking his seat. "He and a friend were getting set up to do a supermarket robbery when they got scared spitless at sight of Davidoff running toward them and they shot him and killed him."

"I see." Kay Carson found herself wanting to draw sympathy out of the man rather than look at his suddenly cold face. "I suppose you

were right, and I really don't have anything to reproach myself with, after all."

Nowlin waited for a long time before making any reply. Then he said, surprisingly, "Well, there's guilt and there's other guilt, if you know what I mean."

"I do not," she said rigidly, startled that she and Nowlin seemed to have suddenly changed sides in the argument. "Those two men were criminals to begin with and one of them would have used his gun sooner or later. I happened to set it off, but anybody nearby might have done that."

"It's almost rare to feel guilty for something you really did," Nowlin rumbled thoughtfully. "When a close relative dies, for instance, you feel guilt in remembering the things you could have done for that person but didn't. You feel guilt because of thinking that you're alive, even if this close relative isn't. And you feel guilt because you're angry at that relative for having left you, so to speak. I know you feel guilty about what you did, Miss Carson, if that thing was the direct cause of what happened."

"But I don't feel responsible for it any more," she insisted. "You've convinced me I was wrong to take it so badly."

Kay Carson wiped her lips with a napkin and stood up to leave.

Nowlin was lighting a cigarette. He took a puff and said, calmly, "Not yet, please." He put a hand

on hers. His touch was gentle, but he wouldn't let her go. The girl had to sit down again.

"Suppose you had done something wrong, Miss Carson, and it led to the crime. Then you'd have a share of the guilt, too, like the accomplice in the murder."

"But I'm not an accomplice to anything," Kay Carson said warily. "I keep telling you that you've satisfied me on the one score at the very least. You've helped me become a functioning human being again and I'm endlessly grateful."

"Then let me change your mind," Nowlin said, still courteous. "Suppose you were the one who stole some jewelry from the Apex store. You hurried out. The jeweler let off the burglar alarm. Davidoff, close by, hurried toward the store and actually ran into the guilty person as she was making her getaway."

"This is ridiculous," Kay Carson protested. "You've lost your mind!"

"Hear me out, please . . . You were out of breath and terrified. You have to say something to keep Davidoff from suspecting what you've done. You say that you heard a quarrel on the next block. You know how to make it sound convincing; you're always persuading students about one thing or another when you teach. Davidoff believes you and runs in the other direction."

"And of course I follow him," she said crisply, "so he can catch me later and call me a liar."

"No, you start to run towards safety, but you hear the shot when Davidoff is killed. He had run in the direction of the only two men he saw, but they weren't having an argument. Two men getting set to do a robbery won't stop in the middle of the street to argue. Struthers sees the policeman running toward him, though, and becomes terrified. That's why Davidoff died, because you wanted to avoid being seen."

"And I felt so haunted by guilt that I came to the police station afterwards in order to find out firsthand what had taken place." Kay Carson sniffed. "I did feel partly responsible, but that doesn't mean I would do any such foolish—"

"Will you let me search your handbag?" Nowlin asked. "You were probably so upset you didn't even try to get rid of the jewelry you had stolen before you came to the precinct."

"You won't let me search? Then perhaps you'll look over that way, Miss Carson."

Kay wouldn't have done it, if only to spite the detective, but she heard a voice shouting: "That's the girl who robbed me! There she is! I haven't seen her in a good light since the robbery."

It was Mr. Kowalsky, the jeweler. Nowlin had made an extra phone call to bring him over for identification.

"I'm afraid you won our argument," Nowlin said softly to Kay Carson. "All we'll ever pin on you

is the robbery, but you have got every right in the world to feel guilt at what happened."

As Nowlin walked side by side with Kay Carson for the last time, on the way back to the precinct, Nowlin told himself that she could have got away and never directly done any violence, but the girl's

looks and career would be ruined by her spending time in prison. In a way it would be his fault, but the knowledge would never bother him. A man doing his sworn duty couldn't ever have feelings of regret that he was doing it, or even of—well, of deep regret. Call it that.

Of course not.

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Sightless, uncaring, she lay
there. Murder — and worse
— had been there too.

CHARADE FOR MR. WONG

by
DAN
ROSS

MEI WONG, proprietor of the Bombay Art & Curio company, was enjoying his second visit to the United States. His itinerary included a few days in Washington



and he had many friendships to renew there. Naturally, the stout old Chinese took time out to see the cherry blossoms in full bloom, visit the Capitol, the National Gallery of Art, and the Folger Shakespearean Library.

He was also the guest of honor at a number of functions on "Embassy Row." The most important of these was given for him by a former client now serving in a high post at the British Embassy.

It was near midnight and his host, Sir Ralph Andrews, had just driven him back to the gracious Shoreham where he was staying. Sir Ralph saw him to the entrance of the big hotel, and Mei Wong added down the stairs and through the wide corridors to the elevators. Within a few minutes he was whisked up to the fourth floor.

As he reached the door of his room his broad, Oriental face took on a startled look. A thin, furtive man in a dark suit and battered hat stood there, apparently waiting for him.

"Mr. Wong?" The man, showed nervousness.

The old art dealer regarded him cautiously. "That is my name."

"You are the art dealer," the man said. "I have something that may interest you."

Mei Wong hesitated and then decided to invite him in and see what he had to offer. It was not unusual for strangers to learn of his being in a city and come to him

with special art items they thought he might be willing to buy. And even though he did not particularly like the appearance of the stranger he thought he should give him a hearing.

Unlocking the door, Wong said, "I can give you only a few minutes. I am very weary."

Once inside the room Mei Wong sat at the plain desk and waited for his visitor to reveal his business. He studied the man's sallow face and shifty brown eyes. He had a Roman nose that had been broken and not properly set. He was the picture of a man who'd seen better days and was now on his way to becoming a derelict.

The stranger leaned forward. "I just came from Mrs. Vincent Barlow's. She gave me this and said you might buy it from me."

Mei Wong was interested. Mrs. Barlow had been a client of his when she visited India some years before.

He had heard that since then her husband had died and she'd been forced to live on a reduced income and now bought few art objects. She had maintained her home in the Georgetown area of Washington, and her social position. He wondered what connection this shabby stranger could have with such a woman.

The stranger opened a small cardboard box with hands that shook slightly and drew out a small,



exquisite jade figure. He held it up for Mei Wong to see.

"You know this item?" he asked.

Mei Wong nodded soberly. "Yes. I sold it to Mrs. Barlow when she was in India. You mean to say she gave it to you?"

The man nodded. "To pay a debt." Greed showed in his eyes. "How much?"

The old art dealer hesitated.

"Perhaps seven hundred dollars," he said.

The stranger studied the figure. "She said it was good."

Mei Wong frowned. "Naturally I shall have to call Mrs. Barlow first and make sure you came by this item legitimately," he warned.

At once the sallow man showed fear. He set the figure down on the desk and said. "You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

The man licked dry lips. "Be-

cause . . ." he hesitated and then blurted out, "because she's dead!" Terror showed in his weak face. "But don't get the idea I killed her. I found her murdered when I came to pick up this."

Mr. Wong regarded him sternly "You realize this is a very serious admission?"

The man rubbed a hand against his cheek.

"I've been nearly out of my mind not knowing what to do," he said. "I decided if you asked about her I'd tell the truth. I don't want to take chances on a murder charge."

"I shall have to contact the authorities," Mei Wong warned him.

"All right." The sallow man looked as if he might collapse. "May as well get it over with. But no matter what, this belongs to me!"

He picked up the jade lady and hastily slipped it back into the cardboard box.

Mei Wong showed no expression. "The authorities will decide that."

Because he wanted to avoid directly involving the police, and since Mrs. Barlow was formerly a British citizen, he decided to enlist the aid of Sir Ralph Andrews. A half-hour later the British Embassy official knocked at the door of the hotel room. The tall, aristocratic Sir Ralph listened grimly as the stranger repeated his story.

Sir Ralph at once put through a call to a member of the Washington police whom he knew well, and within a short interval Lieutenant

Madison joined them in the hotel room.

Lieutenant Madison asked, "Now, what's this all about?"

The man, whose name it turned out was Norman Wells, sat uncomfortably in a plain-backed chair with the police officer at his side. Mei Wong and Sir Ralph sat a distance from them.

"Now, Mr. Wells," the officer said, "just what were you doing in Mrs. Vincent Barlow's home?"

"I came to get the jade figure," Wells said uneasily. "She promised it to me. We used to be friends."

The officer's eyebrows raised. "She was giving you this valuable piece?"

The man in the chair hunched uncomfortably. "I asked her for a loan. She was short of money and suggested I take this. It was wrapped and waiting for me on her table when I found her."

"And you ask us to believe you weren't responsible for her violent death?"

"I didn't do a thing and I didn't break into the apartment," the man said in a whining voice. "I went here on her invitation. The door was ajar so I walked straight in.

I didn't see her lying there on the floor at first. But when I did, it didn't take a second look to know he was finished." He paused, recalling the horror of the moment.

"We don't need particulars just now," Lieutenant Madison told him with harsh brusqueness. "It

appears to be a straight case of forced entry and homicide. Unless you can offer a good story I'll have to book you."

"But I'm not guilty!" the sallow man protested. "I'll admit I've been blackmailing her, but I wouldn't kill anyone!"

"Blackmailing her?" the police officer glanced across at Mei Wong and Sir Ralph.

"Yes," the sallow man looked down at the crimson carpet, an unhappy expression on his face. "She's been giving me money ever since her husband died. Lately she's been hard up and when I asked for cash tonight she said she hadn't any."

"I see," the lieutenant said grimly. "You've been blackmailing her for several years and when she refused to give you any more money you killed her and took this jade figure!"

"You're all wrong about that," Wells argued. "She told me she'd give me the figure in place of cash and I could sell it to him!" He pointed to Mei Wong. "Said he was visiting here and would be sure to want it!"

Lieutenant Madison looked at the man in the chair sternly. "What did you know about the lady that gave you power to blackmail her?"

He shrugged. "Her husband was married to a girl I knew, years ago. They were separated and then he met Mrs. Barlow in England and married her. After he died I went to Mrs. Barlow and told her the

first wife was still alive. That her husband had been a bigamist and I'd tell the story to the papers if she didn't pay me off."

"Is the story true?" the officer asked.

"Only the part about him having been married before," the man said. "For some reason he didn't tell her about his first wife. And so she was quick to believe my story that his first wife was still alive." He paused. "Truth is, his first wife died in the Midwest before he married the second time."

Mei Wong gave the Washington policeman a knowing glance. Then the old art dealer spoke softly. "So you really had no malicious story to give the newspapers after all?"

"All right," Wells said miserably. "I'll admit it. I did lie and cheat her. But I didn't kill her and that's the truth!"

The lieutenant sighed. "I have your complete statement," he said closing his small black book. "I'll have to take you to police headquarters and charge you."

The sallow man looked at him, aghast. "Charge me! Charge me with murder?"

Mei Wong had risen. Now he came across to face the thin man. "Not with murder, Mr. Wells. But for blackmail. Mrs. Barlow herself will prefer the charge. You have made a rather complete confession, you know."

"What is this?" Wells stared at him in bewilderment. "How can a dead woman prefer charges against me?"

"Simpler than you might think," Mei Wong said calmly. "When I arrived in Washington, Mrs. Barlow came to me with her problem. She was weary of being blackmailed and suspected the truth. I arranged a charade to confuse you. I had the good lady pretend to be her own corpse, counting on your fear to blind your eyes to the deception."

"I was fairly sure you'd follow instructions and come to me to try and raise cash on the figure left out for you. After that it was just a matter of leading you on!"

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